Sept. 9, 1991

# THE NEW YORKER

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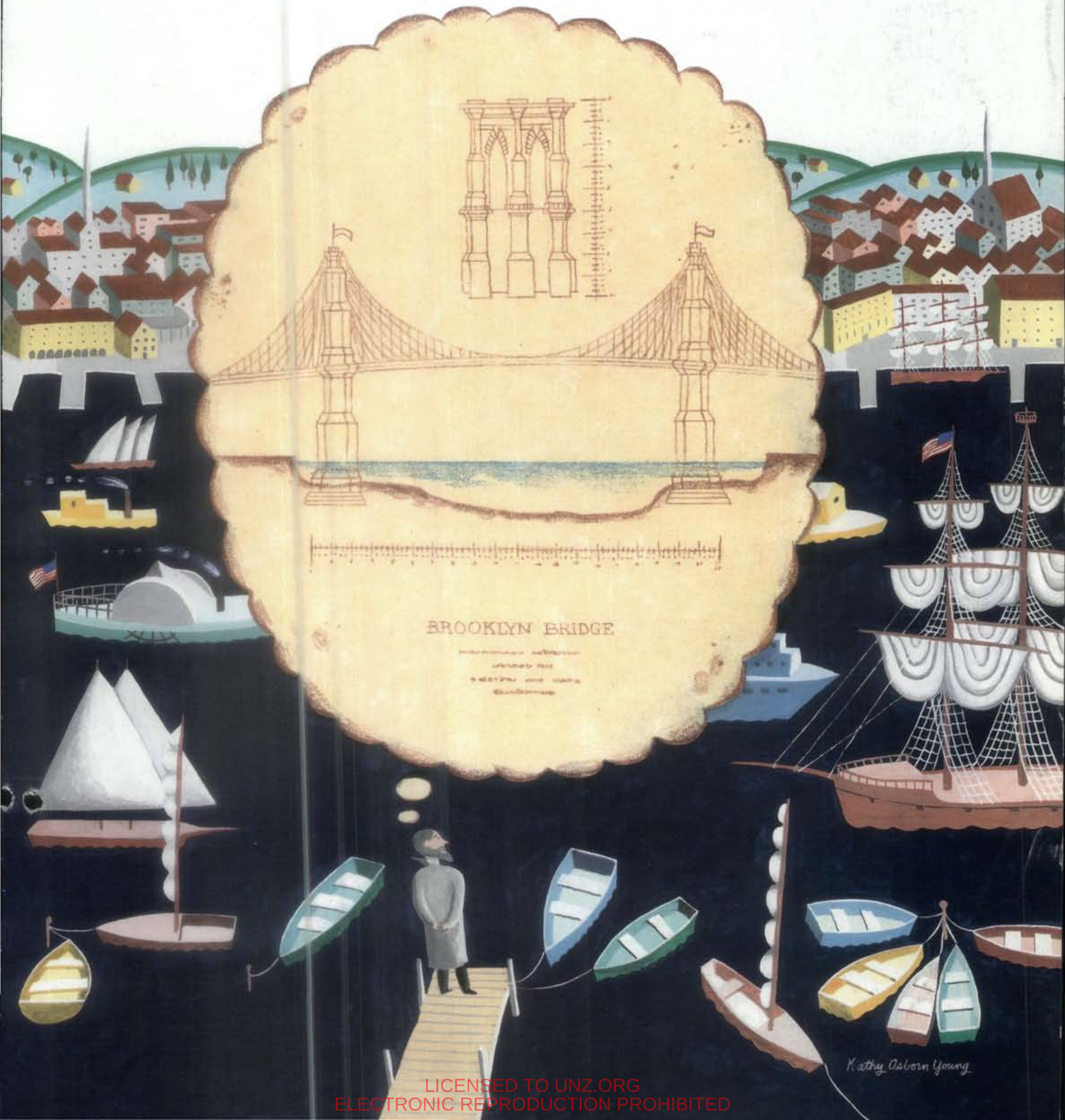
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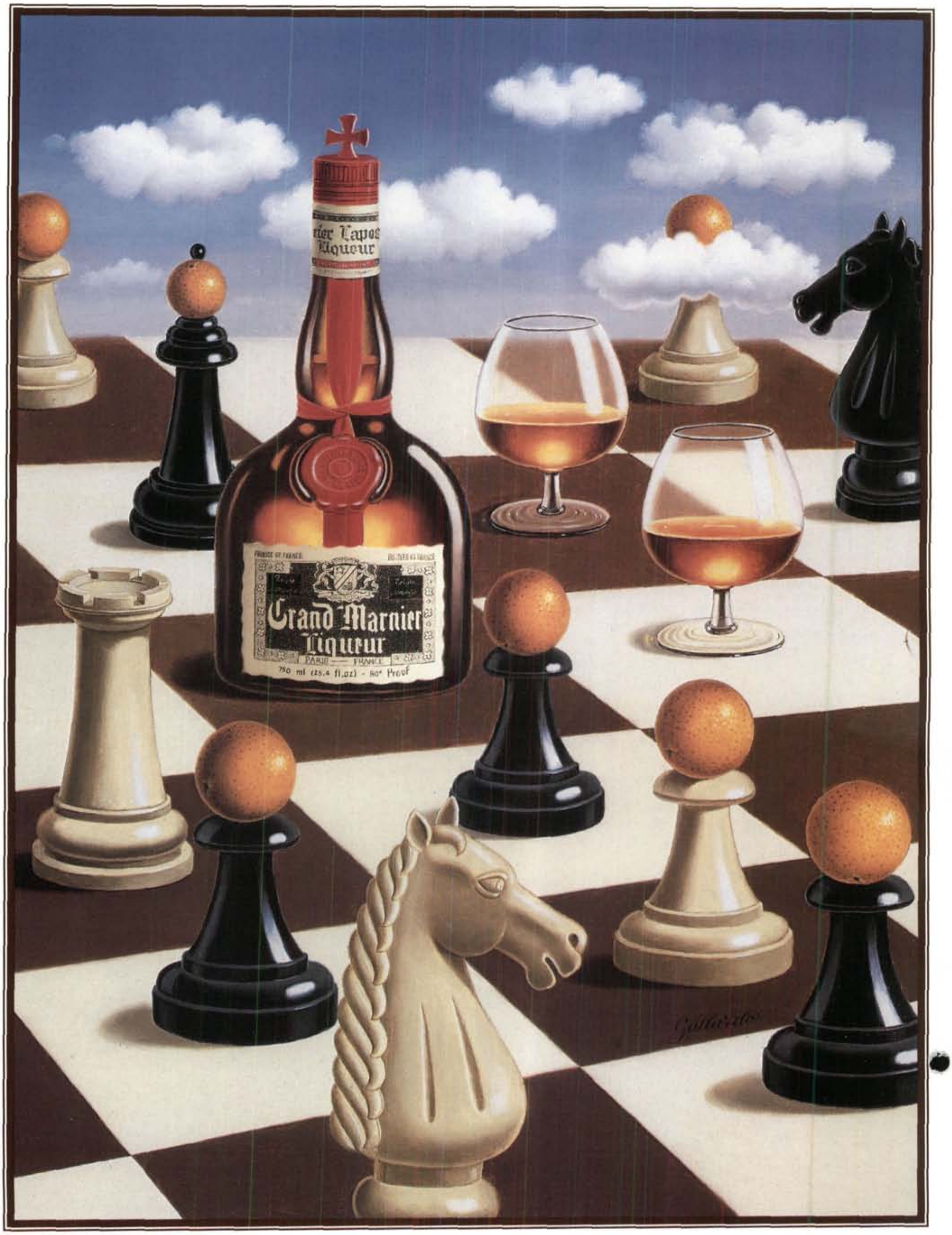
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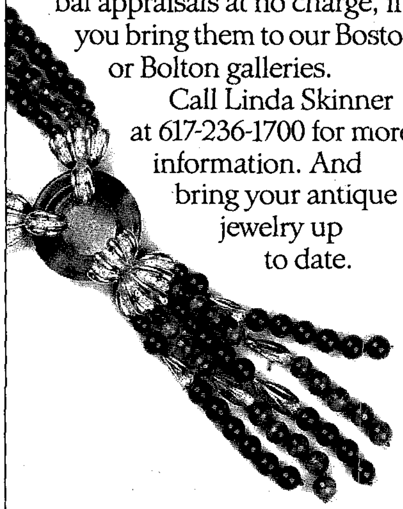

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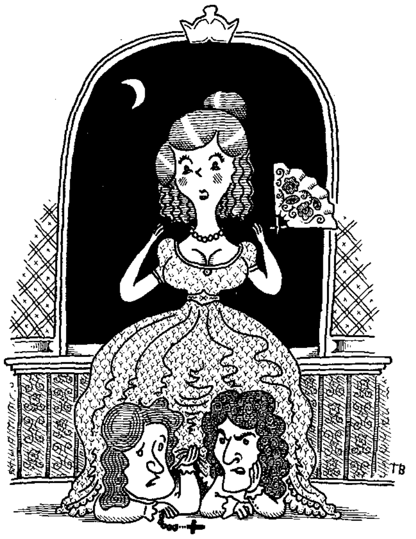
# GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN



*Martin LaPlatney, Joanne Camp, and Frank Geraci in "Tartuffe"*

## THE THEATRE

TRANSLATION is a beggar's art. Its practitioners must often find equivalents for things that beggar description, just as they must locate supplemental employment lest they be turned into beggars. For the young English translator Ranjit Bolt, the practical solution—until last year—involved finance. He worked as an investment adviser in London for several years, while turning out absolutely ingenious translations of seventeenth-century French plays. His rendering of Corneille's "The Liar," used in an Alex Jennings-driven production we caught, in 1989, at the Old Vic, was delightfully superficial. His version of the same playwright's "L'Illusion Comique" is the basis for a production that, over the past two months, has been stimulating audiences at Minneapolis's Guthrie Theatre. And an English colleague informs us that his adaptation of Molière's "Les Femmes Savantes," used in a recent Chichester staging, successfully transformed seventeenth-century bluestockings into structuralism-spouting intellectuals.

We have long harbored the wish that the thirty-two-year-old Mr. Bolt—who, when he is not untangling Alexandrines, is apt to be playing cricket—would turn his attention again to Molière, specifically to "Tartuffe." Much in this comedy from the sixteen-sixties, not least its attacks on the professionally pious, could benefit from an updating. Now comes word that our prayer has been answered: Mr. Bolt is working on just such an adaptation, to be directed by Peter Hall. We can't wait. Meanwhile, we are no less eager to hear Donald M. Frame's version of the play, which will be given its New York début this week in a staging by the Pearl Theatre Company. The production will be overseen by the company's artistic director, Shepard Sobel. Previews begin Friday; opening night is September 12.

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### OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

(Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for schedule and ticket information.)

**ANOTHER PERSON IS A FOREIGN COUNTRY**—A "site-specific" play by Charles L. Mee, Jr. Presented by En Garde Arts and directed by Anne Bogart. Previews Sept. 3-7. Opens Sept. 8 at 8:30, and runs through Sept. 29. (Towers Courtyard, Central Park W. at 106th St. For information about tickets, call 274-8123.)

**DRESS SUITS TO HIRE**—A brief revival of Holly Hughes' 1988 play. Peggy Shaw and Lois Weaver make up the cast. Opens Sept. 7 at 7, and runs through Sept. 21. (One Dream, 232 West Broadway. 279-4200.)

**ESPERANDO LA CARROZA**—A play by the Uruguayan dramatist Jacobo Langsner, performed in Spanish. In previews. (Repertorio Español, Gramercy Arts Theatre, 138 E. 27th St. 889-2850.)

**FINKEL'S FOLLIES**—A show billed as "a new American musical vaudeville," conceived by and starring Fyvush Finkel. In previews. (John Houseman, 450 W. 42nd St. 564-8038.)

**SPARKY'S LAST DANCE**—A play by Richard Lay. Previews Sept. 4-5. Opens Sept. 6 at 8. (45th Street Theatre, 354 W. 45th St. 279-4200.)

**TARTUFFE**—Molière's comedy, in a translation by Donald M. Frame. With Martin LaPlatney, Joanne Camp, and Frank Geraci. Previews begin Sept. 6. (Pearl, 125 W. 22nd St. 645-7708.)

**UNIDENTIFIED HUMAN REMAINS AND THE TRUE NATURE OF LOVE**—A work by Canadian playwright Brad Fraser. Directed by Derek Goldby. Previews begin Sept. 4. (Orpheum, 126 Second Ave., at 8th St. 477-2477.)

### OPENED RECENTLY

**AND THE WORLD GOES 'ROUND: THE SONGS OF KANDER & EBB**—A musical revue, with Joel Blum, Bob Cuccioli, Karen Mason, Terry Burrell, and Karen Ziémba. Andrea Green substitutes for Ms. Ziémba in certain performances. (Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 307-4100.)

**BODY AND SOUL**—David Mitchell and Tom Delling have the leads in John Glines' gay romantic comedy. Mr. Glines directed. (Courtyard Playhouse, 39 Grove St. 869-3530.)

**BREAKING LEGS**—The Mafia meets Off Broadway. Philip Bosco and Vincent Gardenia play a pair of mobsters who back a new play in order to win a young dramatist for Gardenia's daughter. Tom Dulack wrote the comedy; John Tillinger directed it. With Victor Argo, Larry Storch, Nicolas Surovy, and, above all, Susan Giosa as the daughter who spins the plot. (Reviewed in our issue of 6/3/91.) (Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 580-1313.)

**DAMON RUNYON'S TALES OF BROADWAY**—A show conceived and performed by John Martello. (Double Image, 15 Vandam St. 924-1120.)

**THE GOOD TIMES ARE KILLING ME**—The cartoonist Lynda Barry devised this memory play of words and pop tunes about a racially mixed neighborhood. At the heart of it is the friendship of two little girls, one white, the other black, who are delightfully portrayed by Angela Goethals and Chandra Wilson. The undercurrent of serious comment on race doesn't add much, but every humorous scene scores a bull's-eye. Also with Wendell Pierce and Holly Felton. Mark Brokaw directed. The show was seen this spring at Second Stage. (5/6/91) (Minetta Lane Theatre, 18 Minetta Lane, east of Sixth Ave., between W. 3rd and Bleecker Sts. 420-8000.)

**THE JERSEY GIRLS**—A play by Larry Manogue. (Actors Playhouse, 100 Seventh Ave. S. 691-6226.)

**LIPS TOGETHER, TEETH APART**—Two couples share a beach house on Fire Island over the Fourth of July weekend, in Terrence McNally's very funny play about a number of serious matters. With Roxanne Hart, Anthony Heald, Nathan Lane, and Deborah Rush. Jonathan Hadary replaces Mr. Lane starting Sept. 10. (7/8/91) (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-7907.)

**LOST IN YONKERS**—There's not one glimmer of honesty or authenticity in this family melodrama by Neil Simon. Set in Yonkers during the Second World War, it's about what happens when a cowering, pathetic man has to leave his two adolescent sons with his intimidating mother for the better part of a year. (3/11/91) (Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 221-1211.)

**THE MATCHMAKER**—Dorothy Loudon stars in a revival of the Thornton Wilder comedy. Directed by Lonny Price. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Roundabout, 100 E. 17th St. 420-1883. Closes Sept. 22.)

**MISS SAIGON**—Oh, the horror! The horror! (4/29/91) (Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 239-6200.)

**PAGEANT**—A musical spoof of beauty contests. Book and lyrics by Bill Russell and Frank Kelly and music by Albert Evans. Conceived and directed by Robert Longbottom. (Blue Angel, 321 W. 44th St. 262-3333.)

**PENN & TELLER ROT IN HELL**—Seen recently on the Great White Way, the dynamic duo are now performing their repertoire of tricks Off Broadway. (John Houseman, 450 W. 42nd St. 564-8038.)

**RED SCARE ON SUNSET**—If you're in the market for a lot of laughs (and a strange catharsis), you couldn't do better than this latest comedy of manners by the actor/writer/farceur Charles Busch—about a Hollywood personality whose paranoid anti-Stalinist fantasies turn out to be true. With this satire on politics, theatre, and sexuality, Busch creates a showcase for his own subtle talents and those of the actress Julie Halston. (8/5/91) (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 924-8782. Closes Sept. 15.)

**THE SECRET GARDEN**—This lovely musical adaptation of the classic children's story by Frances Hodgson Burnett isn't just a kiddie show. Subtle, charming, intelligent, and wholly literary in its approach to adaptation, it manages both to be faithful to the spirit of the book and to comment on the particular moment in time that produced it. (5/13/91) (St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

**THE SKIN OF OUR TEETH**—Thornton Wilder's play, presented by the Jean Cocteau Repertory. (Bouwerie Lane Theatre, 330 Bowery, at Bond St. 677-0060.)

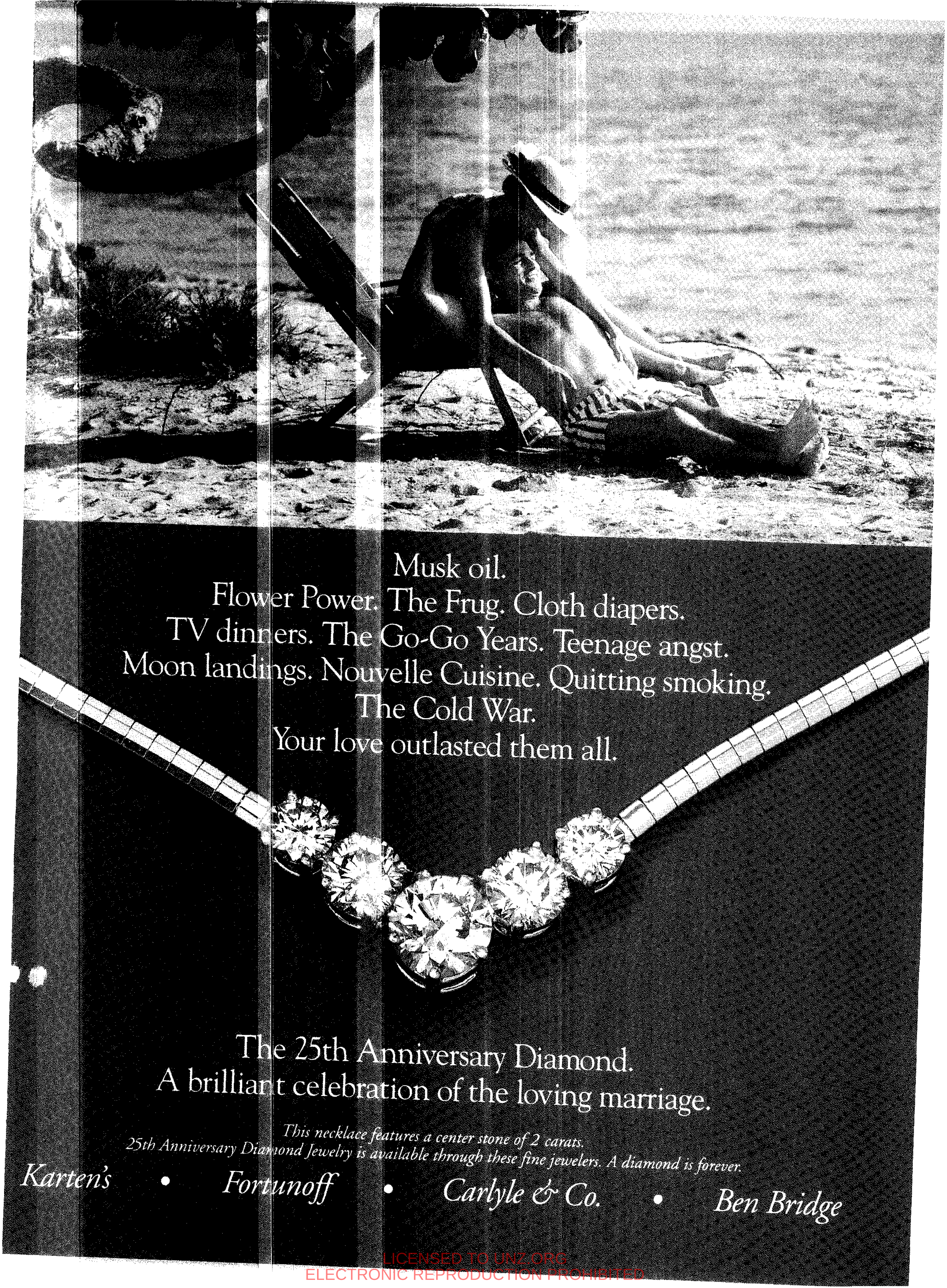
**SONG OF SINGAPORE**—A musical with a promising concept: turn a Polish veterans' hall into a Singapore night club, circa 1941, and spill murder and mayhem onto the premises. Unfortunately, the lavish settings (by John Lee Beatty) and the musical talent (led by the winsome and versatile Donna Murphy) cannot conceal a very thin story and a host of excruciatingly bad jokes. Another problem: on a busy night the seating arrangements here can be extremely cramped. (17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. 228-0844.)

**THE TEMPEST**—The season finale of Shakespeare in the Park. Performed, in Spanish, by Venezuela's Rajatabla company. (Delacorte, Central Park near W. 81st St. Closes Sept. 8. For information about free tickets, which are required, call 861-7277.)

**THE WILL ROGERS FOLLIES**—The sets by Tony Walton, the direction and choreography by Tommy Tune, the costumes by Willa Kim, and the row upon row of Ziegfeld girls make a feast for the eyes, but the funny bone and heart are neglected. Keith Carradine makes an engaging, amusing Rogers, but that is not enough, despite Cy Coleman's pleasant score. (5/13/91) (Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 730-8200.)

### LONG RUNS

**CATS:** Some twenty poems about cats by T. S. Eliot, set to music by Andrew Lloyd Webber. A mighty spectacle about mighty little, owing its effectiveness to Trevor Nunn's direction and to John Napier's sets and costumes. (Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 239-6200.). . . **CITY OF ANGELS:** Larry Gelbart, dramatist; Cy Coleman, composer; Billy Byers, arranger; and Michael Blakemore, director, are all in top form in this sharp, jokey musical satire about Hollywood in the forties. (Virginia, 245 W. 52nd St. 239-6200.). . . **THE FANTASTICKS:** The longest-running long run turned thirty-one in May. (Sullivan Street Playhouse, 181 Sullivan St., at Bleecker St. 674-3838.). . . **FORBIDDEN BROADWAY 1991½:** This newly revised revue is a cluster of



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### A LITTLE LORE

*The Giorgio de Chirico work "Ettore e Andromaca," in the lobby of the 56th Street entrance to 712 Fifth Avenue, surprises you: first, because it's a sculpture and de Chirico is usually thought of as strictly a painter, and, second, because it's so romantic. Andromache shelters her face against Hector's chest while a vigorous Trojan wind billows the plume on his helmet and the fleece attached to his armor. Only when you get closer do you realize that Hector's face is featureless, a crease down its center; that his legs are riveted together; and that there's a small scalene triangle stuck between the couple at waist level. De Chirico died in 1978; the eighty-six-inch-high sculpture is the third of an edition of eight that de Chirico's widow, Isabella, authorized in 1986. It was cast by the Fondaria d'Arte Tesconi from a model that de Chirico made in 1940. Anything else you want to know you can learn from Edward Van Sickle, the concierge at 712. Mr. Van Sickle thinks like a curator—he even has handy a scrapbook containing a pertinent Friedrich von Schiller poem, "Hektor's Abschied" ("Hector's Farewell"). Years ago, when he lived in Rome, Mr. Van Sickle knew de Chirico, and he will tell you, among other stories, how the painter/sculptor held court daily every fall and every spring at Café Rosati.*

parodies of shows along the Great White Way. Gerard Alessandrini conceived and directed it, and wrote the barbed lyrics. (Theatre East, 211 E. 60th St. 838-9090.)... **FOREVER PLAID:** Stuart Ross's loving tongue-in-cheek salute to the "guy groups" of the fifties is a real treat. Bring your mom. Hell, bring the whole family. (Steve McGraw's, 158 W. 72nd St. 595-7400.)... **GRAND HOTEL:** The dazzling imagination of Tommy Tune's direction and choreography and the dazzling scenery by Tony Walton almost make up for the inner vacancy of this show, but not quite. The story and characters are skimpy and the music is undistinguished. Nevertheless, there isn't a boring moment. (Martin Beck, 302 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)... **LES MISÉRABLES:** The stars of this musical adaptation of the Victor Hugo novel are John Napier's settings and David Hersey's lighting. (Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)... **NUNSENSE:** A musical comedy by Dan Goggin. (Douglas Fairbanks, 432 W. 42nd St. 239-4321.)... **ONCE ON THIS ISLAND:** An enchanting musical, set in the Caribbean, by Lynn Ahrens and Stephen Flaherty. (Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)... **PERFECT CRIME:** A murder mystery by Warren Manzi. (Theatre Four, 424 W. 55th St. 695-3401.)... **THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA:** This much ballyhooed Andrew Lloyd Webber musical is fun—if you're not bothered by theatre that cares not a whit for words and contains not one ghost of an idea. Except for the sets, everything about the show is negligible. (Majestic, 245 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)... **SIX DEGREES OF SEPARATION:** You're best off knowing nothing about the John Guare play other than that it represents a perfect meeting of the playwright and the director Jerry Zaks. Out of a true story—one apparently about celebrity and Good Samaritanism—Guare has fashioned a wistful comedy about race, class, money, imagination, collective conscience, individual psyche, and the impulse toward art. Kelly Bishop now has the lead. (Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

## DANCE

A RECENT mini-festival down at the Public Theatre subtitled "Fifty Years of Choreography in Hollywood Musicals" was headlined "Mostly Busby"—even though Busby Berkeley had choreographed only six of the seventeen films being screened. But we know what they meant: mostly Busby in spirit—lots of great-looking dancers, showing off lots of flesh, in precision routines that keep transforming individuals into the building blocks of vertiginous, skyscraping fantasies, most of which toy with themes of sex and death. In the context of this series, Bob Fosse's "Cabaret" becomes a most profound homage.

Berkeley seemed to have worked especially well with songs where emotional irony is built in—songs in which the words are happy or festive while the music leads you out a back door into some kind of dark alley. One senses this even in a number as simple as "The Lullaby of Broadway," for the movie "Gold Diggers of 1935," which Berkeley directed as well as choreographed. Harry Warren's tune certainly jumps and swings, but the way it rises and falls is a touch odd, unstable. When you hear the song on its own, that oddness becomes a fugitive part of its charm. But in the movie, Berkeley made that quality the focus of his images, and the result is a cinematic dream dance with the bitter magic—if without the political bile—of Weimar Republic art. Loosely following Al Dubin's lyrics, the story of the dance concerns a Broadway Baby who sleeps all day and lives it up all night; the climax of her fun, and the start of her downfall, comes at a night club proportioned like a modern tyrant's mausoleum, with blank walls rising to infinity and a bank of sharp, shallow steps that zigzag—pointlessly—downward to nowhere. A pair of adagio dancers impersonally couple on the count of four and a huge dancing chorus floods in to replace them. Suddenly, the heroine—who, with her date, has been watching the action from a balcony table—joins in for the finale. Pursued by the chorus, she becomes their advance guard and, bursting through a pair of French doors, plunges to her death.

"Sleep tight, let's call it a day," the song goes. On the screen, the girl's face fills the frame. She exhales smoke from a cigarette. She's been daydreaming: the whole sequence has taken place in the space-time of one drag. We can't speak for the resonance this transformation would have had in 1935, but we know what *we* feel: oh, baby, the milkman has come and gone, and your world's in the arms of an iceman.

**Pilar Rioja**—Classical Spanish and flamenco dance. Included on the program are four new works: "Danzas" and "Danza Nueva," based on classical court dance, and "Soleá" and "Tener La Esperanza," which combine modern dance and flamenco. (Repertorio Español, Gramercy Arts Theatre, 138 E. 27th St. 889-2850. Sept. 3, Sept. 5, and Sept. 10-11, all at 8; and Sept. 4 at 7. Through Sept. 29.)

## NIGHT LIFE

TAKING the stage at Eighty Eight's the other night, the actress-comedian Julie Halston offered a short, contrite apology—something along the lines of "I'm sorry I'm late; thank you for waiting"—and got a laugh. It's always hard to explain why someone is funny before they're actually funny. Where Halston is concerned, though, it has something to do with her wig—a shimmering blond bob with a poodle-esque flip, which she has referred to as "very Ruta Lee, 1965." It has to do with her long, wheeling arms; her frazzled, put-upon looks; and, of course, her wicked, whose-show-is-this-anyway turn in Charles Busch's play "Red Scare on Sunset."

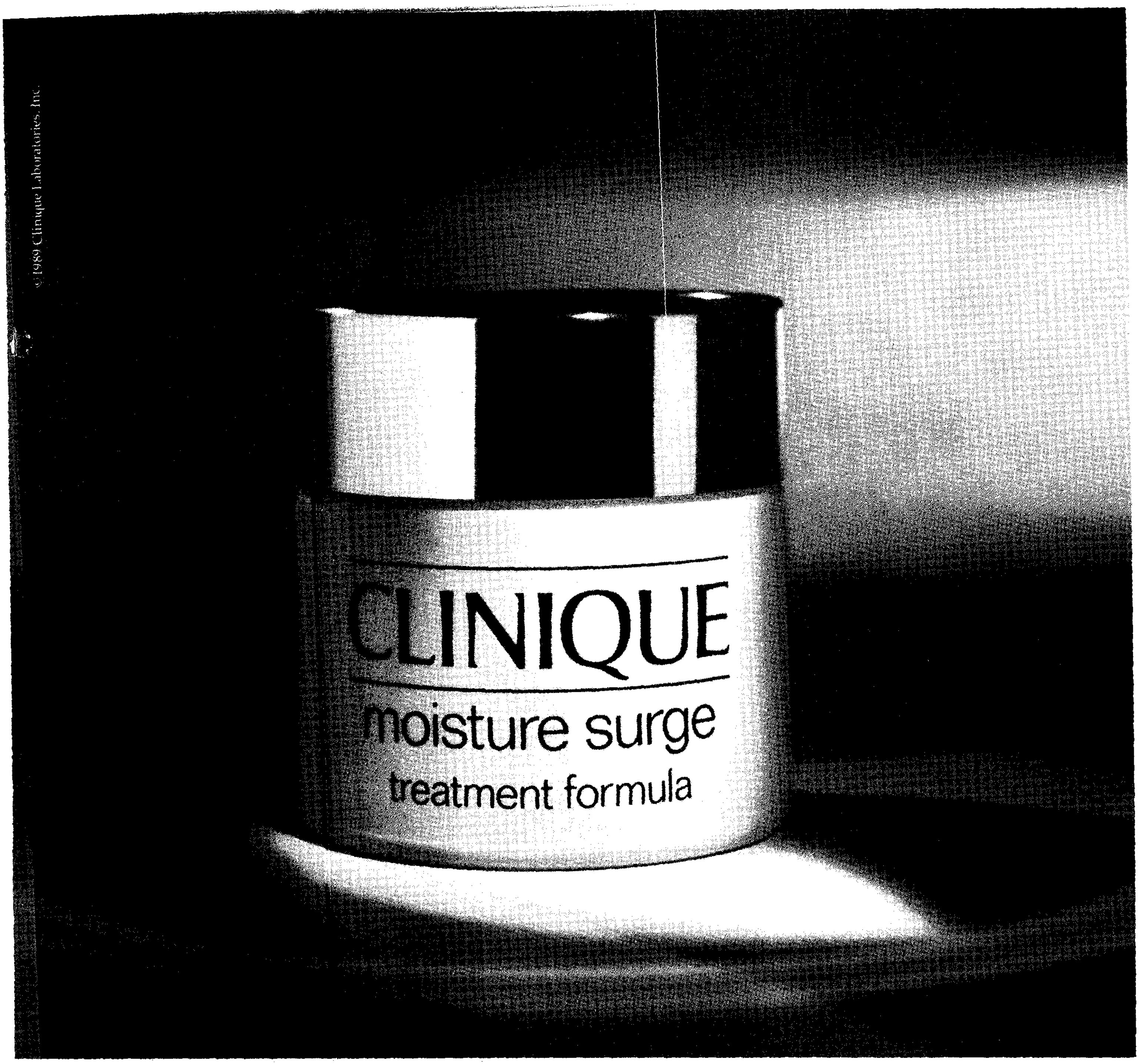
Halston's standup routine—she'll be back at Eighty Eight's (228 West 10th Street) on September 5—seems largely autobiographical. It's the story of a woman born on Pearl Harbor Day, whose mother used to celebrate her daughter's birthday by exclaiming about the suffering of the Jews—"Now, bear in mind, my mother's Irish." It's the story of a woman who worked on Wall Street and was stupefied by secretaries who had no idea that the boss they were falling for was gay: "Greg is the only partner in the firm with a Joffrey Ballet coffee cup! Greg is the only partner in the firm who *owns* his tuxedo! . . . A man does not want to sleep with you if he asks you to accompany him to 'Liza'!" It's the story, finally, of a woman with two, warring natures: that of "a good Catholic schoolgirl" and that of "a flamboyant gay Jewish man."

Halston uses wonderfully clipped, almost telegraphic, segues—wringing laughs out of rather improbable lines like "global village" and "Divorced. Over thirty. Hormonally imbalanced." She's at her best, as many comedians are, when she's chronicling life's little insults. Adopting the voice of her agent, for instance, Halston recounts a pitch she heard for a tiny part in "The Silence of the Lambs": "New Jodie Foster movie. Psychopath. Skins alive large Midwestern women." Pause. "Thought of you."

(A highly arbitrary listing, in which boldface type is used to pick out a few of the more notable performers in town. . . . ¶ Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives that are subject to last-minute change; it is therefore always advisable to call ahead.)

**Arthur's Tavern,** 57 Grove St. (675-6879)—A quirky, endearing Village watering hole, perpetually decorated for the holidays—a[illegible] of them. The musicians work in the back of the room, in a well ringed by a bar—a setup that seems to bring out the latent show-biz tendencies in some of the bar's patrons. Mondays belong to the Grove Street Stompers, Tuesdays through Thursdays to Al Bundy, Fridays and Saturdays to Mabel Godwin, and Sundays to Lee Lorenz and the Creole Cookin' Jazz Band. Music from nine-thirty.

**Ballroom,** 253 W. 28th St. (244-3005)—A tony cabaret attained by passing through an opulent tapas restaurant, where wicker baskets overflow with fruit and vegetables and a row of hams hangs over the bar; if you haven't had dinner, you may never make it to the show. **LYPSINKA**—fresh from a gig in Los Angeles, and played, as always, by John Epperson—will be here through Sept. 8. The "Fabulous Lypsinka Show" is an evening of lip-synching and dancing that usually in-



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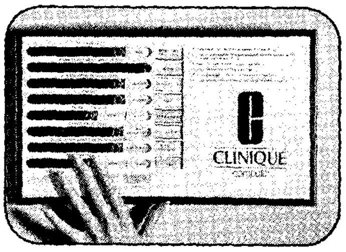

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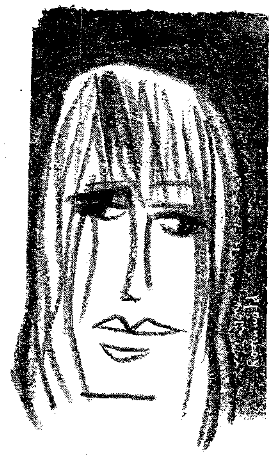
## NIGHT LIFE—Cont'd

cludes little-known numbers from Dolores Gray, Gisele Mackenzie, Julie Wilson, and Kaye Ballard. Shows Sept. 3-5 and Sept. 8 at nine, and Sept. 6-7 at nine and eleven-fifteen. Singer-guitarist **CAETANO VELOSO**—a Brazilian pop figure of long and distinguished standing, whose latest record, "Estrangeiro," was released by Elektra a while back—begins a week-long engagement on Sept. 10. Shows Tuesdays through Thursdays at nine, and Fridays and Saturdays at nine and eleven-fifteen.



*Lucinda Williams at Maxwell's and at the Bottom Line*

**BIRDLAND,** 2745 Broadway, at 105th St. (749-2228)—The jazz personnel turns over nearly every night at this airy, loftlike restaurant-bar, in the gray zone between Zabar's and Columbia. Some may cry gentrification at the sight of the pastel walls, the potted greenery, and the bar crowded with Frascati sippers, but the floor-to-ceiling windows make for some fine Broadway-viewing. This week: the **MARK SOSKIN** trio performs Sept. 4-5; **LEE KONITZ** comes in Sept. 6-7 (he'll be making a live recording, with some help from the **BARRY HARRIS** trio); the **JENS WINTHER** quartet is here on Sept. 8; and the **DAVE STRYKER** quartet can be heard on Sept. 9. Music from nine. Dining.

**BITTER END,** 149 Bleecker St. (673-7030)—For the price of a drink or two, you can catch a handful of bands here any night of the week. (The cover charge is mostly a formality—walk along Bleecker Street and you're sure to have a free pass handed to you.) In the old days, as a mural behind the bar attests, the club hosted the likes of Bob Dylan, Linda Ronstadt, and Joni Mitchell. Now you're not likely to recognize anyone onstage unless you went to high school with them. Music from eight-thirty Sundays through Thursdays, and from nine on Fridays and Saturdays.

**BLUE NOTE,** 131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (475-8592)—A jazz club that would be a perfect stop on a bus tour (there's even a souvenir shop that sells Kodak). It's a good idea to make a reservation and show up well in advance. Drummer and bandleader **MAX ROACH** brings in a double quartet Sept. 3-8. Roach, one of the premier drummers of the past several decades, has an uncanny ability to stay ahead of the times; he was a seminal force in both bebop and hard bop, and the early eighties found him working with rappers. Beginning Sept. 10, there's a double bill consisting of **STEPS AHEAD** and the ***BILL EVANS SUPERBAND,*** with **DENNIS CHAMBERS**. First set at nine. Dining.

**BOTTOM LINE,** 15 W. 4th St., at Mercer St. (228-6300)—A big, pleasant room where they pack them in until someone cries uncle. There will be a songwriter's evening here on Sept. 5 that will include **ARTHUR ALEXANDER, PAT ALGER, DONNIE FRITTS, WILLIE NILE,** and **LUCINDA WILLIAMS**. Also this week: **STEVE FORBERT** appears on Sept. 6; **RICHIE HAVENS** performs on Sept. 7; and **BIG DADDY** comes in on Sept. 11. Shows at eight and eleven, except on Sept. 5, when they start at seven-thirty and ten-thirty. Burgers, fries, and other things to make your heart beat faster.

**BRADLEY'S,** 70 University Pl., at 11th St. (228-6440)—A neighborhood bar in the heart of N.Y.U. country. It's advisable to get all your talking done between sets, because once the first chord is struck the audience here—with a little help from the management—becomes as quiet as a church congregation. A trio consisting of pianist **MICHAEL WEISS,** bassist **DENNIS IRWIN,** and drummer **LEWIS NASH** is in swing through Sept. 7. Pianist **JOANNE BRACKEEN** and bassist **CECIL MC BEE** begin a six-night engagement on Sept. 9. Music from ten. Dining.

**CAFÉ SIN-É,** 122 St. Marks Pl. (982-0370)—An unpretentious storefront café devoted to such things as Irish stew and the *Irish Times*. There's no stage per se, but bohemian musicians gather around a piano and work up some nice, wistful sets while bohemian patrons sit writing in journals, rolling cigarettes, or lingering over one of the two varieties of beer sold here: Budweiser and Rolling Rock. Sin-é means "that's it" in Gaelic and is *not* Sinéad O'Connor's nickname. The café is a nice place to while away an hour, and you never know who'll turn up and tune up. Music generally begins at about eight-thirty.

**CARLYLE HOTEL,** Madison Ave. at 76th St. (744-1600)—Pianist-vocalist **RONNY WHYTE,** who just finished up a Cole Porter tribute at Rainbow & Stars, begins a stretch in Bemelmans' Bar on Sept. 3. Sets from nine-thirty Tuesdays through Saturdays.

**CBGB & OMFUG,** 315 Bowery, at Bleecker St. (982-4052)—In the late seventies and early eighties, this dark cave (graffitied walls, a battered pool table, rest rooms for the intrepid only) was the hub of a thriving punk-music scene—Blondie, Talking Heads, the Ramones, and Television were regular attractions. Other clubs of the era have fizzled, but CB's perseveres, and young musicians continue to fill the stage nightly. Music from nine-thirty Sundays through Thursdays and from ten-thirty on Fridays and Saturdays.

**CONDON'S,** 117 E. 15th St. (254-0960)—Jazz clubs aren't always known for their romantic atmosphere, and Condon's earns higher marks than most. It's a low-ceilinged basement establishment, with lemon walls and abundant candlelight. They rearranged the furniture here a while back, so that now a greater number of people look at the stage rather than at a pole. The house is dark until Sept. 10, when bluesman **JIMMY WITHERSPOON** begins a week-long stay. Witherspoon is a singer who puts his own imprint on standards, injecting them with personal reminiscence and biting humor. When we saw him a while back, his set included a Jimmy Reed shuffle, Peetie Wheatstraw's "Big Leg Woman," and his own "I Don't Gotta" ("I don't gotta take you to the dentist tomorrow/ cause I'm knocking out your teeth tonight"). Music begins after nine.

**CONTINENTAL DIVIDE,** 25 Third Ave, at St. Marks Pl. (529-6924)—Hipsters, posers, N.Y.U. students, the occasional skinhead—a typical East Village bar. The motif is prehistoric punk—a Stone Age mural, assorted toy dinosaurs and pterodactyls—and on peak nights there's a take-no-prisoners atmosphere. Shows Sundays through Thursdays at ten, Fridays and Saturdays at eleven.

**DAN LYNCH,** 221 Second Ave., at 14th St. (677-0911)—As uninviting a hole-in-the-wall as you're likely to find, this blues bar is dingy, depressingly lit, and located on a block out of a Gus Van Sant movie. In the world of blues, however, this spells authenticity, and the bands here are often worth the trouble. Music from ten nightly.

**DUPLEX,** 61 Christopher St., at Seventh Ave. (255-5438)—A two-floor entertainment center. The cheery white downstairs bar has French windows giving on to the bustle of Seventh Avenue, but the real clamor is indoors. Everyone is a star here—the pianist, the bartender, the waiters and waitresses, and the audience. Pop standards are sung/shouted, usually with altered, risqué lyrics; wisecracks are fired across the room; and everyone laughs too hard. Upstairs there's a quieter bar and a cabaret, where you'll find a variety of performers nightly.

**FAT TUESDAY'S,** 190 Third Ave., at 17th St. (533-7902)—The seating arrangement in this long, narrow, red-velvet-and-mirror-walled basement makes flying coach seem roomy; nevertheless, it's one of the city's top jazz spots—thanks largely to the club's talent bookers. But watch your head. **DOROTHY DONEGAN,** who's here with a trio Sept. 3-8, has a virtuosic technique, which reflects both her classical training and her days as an Art Tatum protégée. But she's equally renowned for the vaudevillian antics that have been her trademark throughout her fifty-year career: dancing, stomping, rolling her head, impersonating jazz divas, and generally raising Cain. The **JOE HENDERSON** quartet begins a two-week-long stand on Sept. 10. On Mondays, guitarist- inventor **LES PAUL** leads a trio. Music from eight. Dining.

**KNICKERBOCKER,** 33 University Pl., at 9th St. (228-8490)—An Old New York kind of place, with dark-wood panelling, white tablecloths, and brass-figurine lamps. Pianist **ROLAND HANNA** and bassist **PAUL WEST** work out Wednesdays through Saturdays. Music from nine-forty-five.

**KNITTING FACTORY,** 47 E. Houston St., near Mulberry St. (219-3055)—Situated in a neighborhood that boasts the Puck Building to the west and a host of windshield washers to the east, this modest space provides a forum for free-thinking musicians. Beat and melody are optional, "music" and "noise" relative terms. The schedule, in part: Gary Lucas and Echoes of God on Sept. 5; Fertile Crescent and Miracle Room on Sept. 6; Oren Bloedow, Church of Betty, and others on Sept. 7; and a six-night klezmer festival beginning Sept. 10, with the **KLEZMATICS** claiming the first night. Music after nine.

**LUDLOW STREET CAFÉ,** 165 Ludlow St. (353-0536)—A modest below-stairs room that looks like a slightly spruced-up tenement-building apartment. There's cheap Ecuadoran food, a Greater East Village crowd, and, every Monday night, **BEAT RODEO,** a straight-shooting bar band that plays a mix of country, blues, Dylan, Byrds, the Velvets, and various pop curiosities. Sets at eleven.

**MANNY'S CAR WASH,** 1558 Third Ave., at 87th St. (369-2583)—A bright spot on the little-heralded Upper East Side club scene. Don't go expecting to be sprayed with soapy water and massaged by large brushes: the fluorescent sign outside is the only car-wash reference. Inside, the place looks like an adman's idea of a blues bar. **JOAN OSBORNE,** who performs here on Sept. 11, is not a particularly well-kept secret, nor should she be. The twenty-eight-year-old, Kentucky-born singer and her band offer a bright, pop-inflected variety of blues. Osborne has a wonderfully raspy voice, over which she exerts an extraordinary amount of control, and she is usually seen slinking about the stage, lolling her head dreamily, shaking her kinky red hair, and letting out growling variations on the "aaaah yeah"/"allll *right*" theme. Sets from nine-fifteen, except on Sundays, when shows begin at eight-thirty.

**MAXWELL'S,** 1039 Washington St., Hoboken (1-201 798-4064)—A plain blue back room whose far wall is decorated with round things: a Frisbee, some singles, a drum head, and the woofer from a speaker cabinet, to name a few. The beer of choice here is Rolling Rock—by a landslide—and the crowd may make you feel as if you have a midterm to study for, but many of the bands playing here today will be playing somewhere more expensive tomorrow. A few years back, **LUCINDA WILLIAMS,** who'll be here on Sept. 6, had this to say of her sound: "If you wanted to call my music something, I guess you could say it's American roots rock or blues-folk-country, because if you separate the songs out, that's what I do—folk, blues, country, folk-rock, rock and roll. But that's not a name." Critics have been hailing Williams for some time, expecting her to ride to prominence on the coattails of Tracy Chapman and Michelle Shocked. She hasn't, of course, but it ain't over yet. Sets on Sept. 6 at eight-thirty and eleven-thirty.

**MICHAEL'S PUB,** 211 E. 55th St. (758-2272)—**MEL TORMÉ,** whose well-preserved pop-jazz baritone can be heard in this midtown jazz lair as of Sept. 10, was singing on the radio regularly by the age of four. Since then, he co-wrote that song about "Chesnuts roasting on an open fire"; he made his movie début, along with Sinatra, in "Higher and Higher"; and he penned a frank biography of Judy Garland, as well as his own autobiography, 1988's "It Wasn't All Velvet." Tormé's recent shows have remained lively, but often he isn't onstage very long: he dashes in, sings some remember-this-ones, spins a few yarns, dishes out the requisite hokey patter, and dashes off again. And, because Tormé can always bring 'em in, the club is usually so packed with tables that patrons barely have room to swivel their heads. It gets harder and harder for clubgoers to live in the past. Shows Tuesdays through Thursdays at nine-fifteen, Fridays and Saturdays at eight-forty-five and eleven-fifteen, and Sundays at seven-thirty.

**RAINBOW & STARS,** 30 Rockefeller Plaza. (632-5000)—A great, pricey cabaret in the sky, where the tables are strewn with plastic diamonds and sapphires. **JULIE WILSON** swings into action on Sept. 3. Shows at nine and eleven-fifteen. Dining. Closed Sundays and Mondays.

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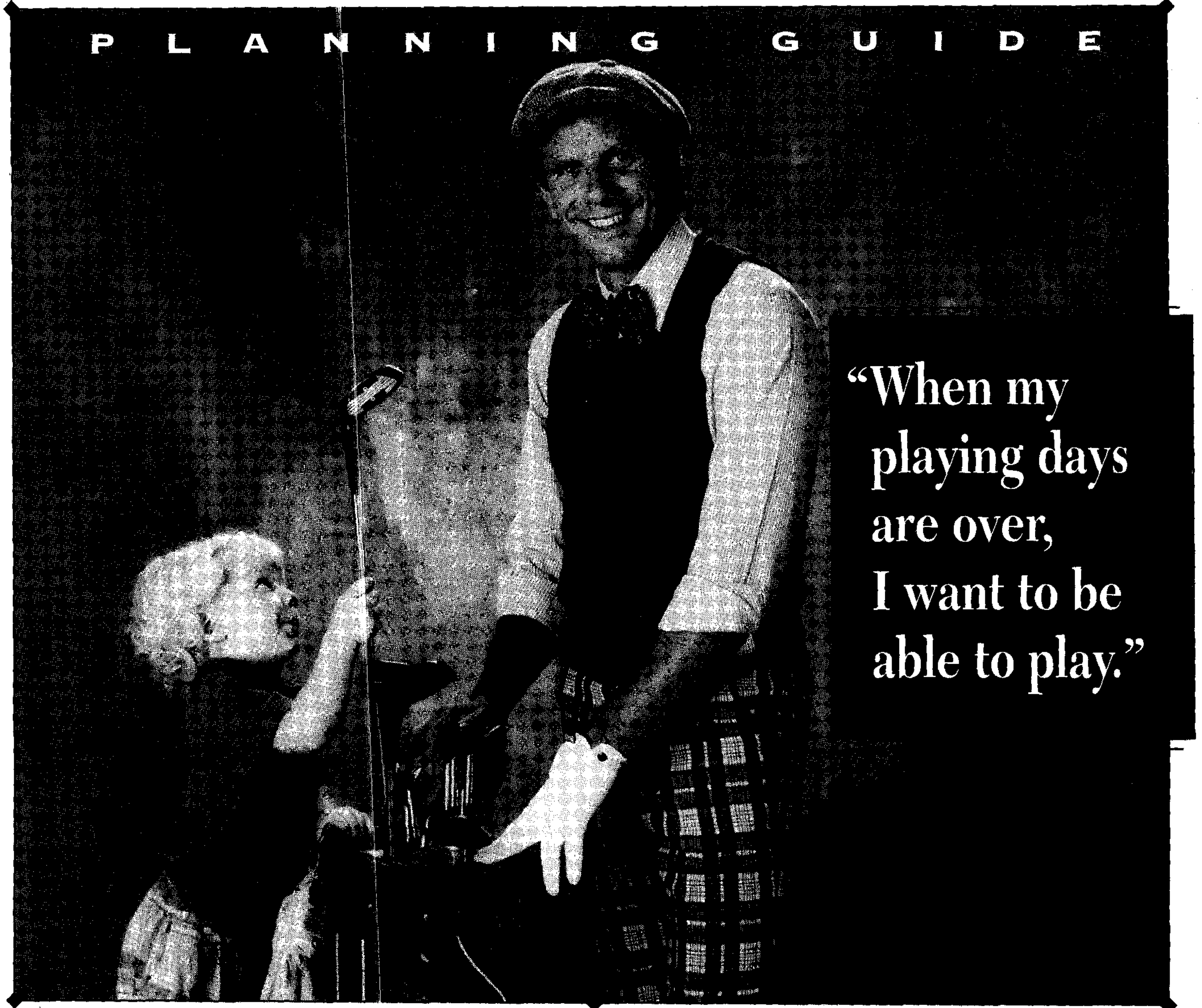

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# GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

**Red Blazer Too,** 349 W. 46th St. (262-3112)—A place where a fella and a gal can put on the feedbag, get a little tight, and cut a rug. The lineup: Howie Wyeth's ragtime trio on Mondays, **VINCE GIORDANO** and his crew on Tuesdays, Sam Ulano and His Dixielanders on Fridays, Bob Cantwell's group on Saturdays, and various other outfits on other nights.

**Ritz,** 254 W. 54th St. (541-8900)—This decaying theatre was once the famous Studio 54, where the late Steve Rubell's henchmen helped popularize the policy of turning away the unbeautiful. Now it's the home of one of the city's biggest, oldest, and loudest rock clubs, which was formerly housed in a decaying ballroom in the East Village. The club features a broad stage, mobile-home-size speakers, plenty of room to shimmy, and, for the sedentary, a giant Big Brother video screen. **FRONT 242** performs on Sept. 7. Shows begin at nine Sundays through Thursdays, and at eleven Fridays and Saturdays.

**Sticky Mike's Frog Bar,** 8 Great Jones St. (533-3000)—This subterranean jazz haunt—located on a chunk of real estate that's temporarily safe from the encroachment of Tower industries—is a newcomer to New York's night life. On the club's back wall one finds embarrassingly cheesy renderings of full-figured gals—the kind of artwork usually reserved for pinball machines. Otherwise, it's an airy, convivial place with some comfy, diner-style booths, a fleet of IKEA-style tables and chairs, and jazz singers on the bandstand every Monday, beginning at eleven.

**Sweet Basil,** 88 Seventh Ave. S., at Bleecker St. (242-1785)—An itinerary stop for the international jazz groupies who can be seen roaming the streets of the Village. Up front, there's a glass-enclosed sidewalk café; in back is a larger room, with a pressed-tin ceiling, red brick, and more pinewood than a ski lodge. **MC COY TYNER, AVERY SHARPE,** and **AARON SCOTT** claim the weeks beginning Sept. 3 and Sept. 10. An electrified big band belonging to trumpeter **MILES EVANS** is in action on Mondays. Tee-off time is ten. Dining.

**Tramps,** 45 W. 21st St. (727-7788)—Located on a Chelsea block that's like an urban Disneyland (Chelsea Billiards, an indoor miniature-golf course, a trendy all-night diner, Limelight around the corner), this roller-rink-size bar-and-restaurant is a lot bigger and slicker than the old Tramps, but the emphasis on solid rock and blues remains. Pianist-vocalist **PINETOP PERKINS** is on hand Sept. 6. Perkins, who is in his late seventies, has been playing professionally since the thirties. Born in Mississippi, he eventually settled in Chicago, and he spent twelve years touring with Muddy Waters. Perkins' piano style falls somewhere between blues and boogie-woogie; of his singing he once told a reporter, "I holler every once in a while." Music from eight on weeknights and from eight-thirty on Fridays and Saturdays.

**Village Gate,** 160 Bleecker St. (475-5120)—Saxophonist **GATO BARBIERI** performs at the Top of the Gate Sept. 3-8; **DAVE VALENTIN** kicks off on Sept. 10. Music from nine-thirty.

**Village Vanguard,** 178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (255-4037)—The late Max Gordon, who opened this holiest of jazz shrines in 1935, once described the club's early patrons as a mix of "poets, W.P.A. writers, hustlers, broads on the make, and moochers." **GEOFF KEEZER'S** foursome is here Sept. 3-8; the **ARTHUR BLYTHE** quartet commences on Sept. 10. The **VANGUARD JAZZ ORCHESTRA** holds sway on Mondays. Music after nine-thirty.

## EDGE OF NIGHT LIFE

EXCEPT for Stephen Saban in his old *Details* column, no one ever printed a nice word about Limelight that wasn't accompanied by a zug. The club that couldn't last. The Gomer Pyle of discos. The space that lacked Palladium's glamour, Nell's exclusivity, the Sound Factory's depth, Red Zone's d.j.s, China Club's rock-star power, Au Bar's threadbare veneer (both on and off the walls), and Stringfellow's envelope-stuffing press agent. Slimelight, Primeblight, The

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Fallen Arches, The Church of the Lurches—take your pick—was the club people inevitably dragged their feet going into as if they were about to attend a fund-raiser for meter maids, and then haughtily walked out of expecting thank-you cards from the management.

Want to witness the triumph of perseverance over style? Drive by Limelight on a Wednesday night—provided you can squeeze past the convention of quadruple-parked cabs. Evidently, padding is not the only thing that has been chipped off some shoulders this summer, because no other dance hall has been nearly so rafter-packed, and with so wide, so racially-culturally-generationally-and-socially balanced, so sexually hard-to-read a mix of get-out-of-my-way-and-stop-staring-at-me-though-boy-am-I-horny partygoers. This is partly because of alchemy, and partly because the club's interior space is now split in two, each part with a separate entrance. This allows Hump Day (an apt name, in light of the attractions) at Limelight to host both Disco 2000 (in the main chapel), which features acts ranging from Wigstock consciousness-raisers to performances that surpass what Karen Finley did with a sweet potato, and Lick It (in the catacombic rear), which comes complete with a gay p.c. back room on its upper level. The beauty part, however, is that once you're inside, the boundaries between the two clubs get awfully blurry. And thanks to Pat Field, the Gap, Doc Marten, Sebastian, Antique Boutique, ear-piercers, and polyester-lace makers across America, everyone now dresses alike. So look before you leap.

## IN ANOTHER CATEGORY—PERFORMANCE ART, ETC.

**"Sarrasine"**—A music-theatre work presented by Gloria, a British troupe. Written by Neil Bartlett, with music by Nicolas Bloomfield. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 924-0077. Sept. 4-7 and Sept. 10-11 at 8, and Sept. 8 at 3. Through Sept. 15.)

**Penny Arcade**—In a work-in-progress, "State of Grace." (P.S. 122, 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 477-5288. Sept. 5-8 at 8.)

**Annie Sprinkle**—In her new one-woman show, which is, explicitly, about sex. (Sanford Meisner Theatre, 164 Eleventh Ave., at 22nd St. 206-1764. Sept. 10-11 at 8. Through Sept. 22.)

## ART

THE Whitney Museum has recently installed part of its permanent collection along loosely chronological and broadly thematic lines—"American Life in American Art" is the exhibition's title—to highly felicitous effect. The show begins on the second floor with such conservative early-twentieth-century works as Herbert Haseltine's "Meadowbrook Team," a bronze group of polo players, and winds up on the third floor with such radical and disturbing recent objects as Mike Kelley's crocheted-toy hanging and Kiki Smith's waxy, near-flayed figures.

Between these two poles there are many compelling surprises, ranging from rarely displayed works like Paul Cadmus's flamboyantly tawdry "Sailors and Floosies" (1938), with its dormant Billy Budd figure and its graffiti frame, to a seemingly revisionist reappraisal of paintings by several artists, for instance Grace Hartigan, who is grouped with Larry Rivers and David Park under the novel rubric "alternative to Abstract Expression." Revealingly, while the curators have arranged pre-Second World War art in galleries with straightforwardly empirical categories, including "The City," "The Industrial Landscape," and "Landscape and Regional America," postwar art is on the whole organized according to more strictly formal principles and such psychosocial phenomena as anxiety in the suburbs.

Among the punchiest and freshest-looking things on view are Grant Wood's "Study for Breaking the Prairie" (1935-39), a subtly colored triptych that recalls not only trecento painting but also certain recent works, among them "Meltdown Morning," by Neil Jenney; George Tooker's creepy and hilarious "The Subway," of 1950; a trio of weirdnesses by the Magic Realist Louis Guglielmi, including "Terror in Brooklyn" (1941), in which three veiled women under a bell jar are witnesses to a manifestation that may or may not be religious in nature; and, for the second time this year—the first was in MOMA's "Forties" show—Jacob Lawrence's fourteen-part "War Series" (1946-47).

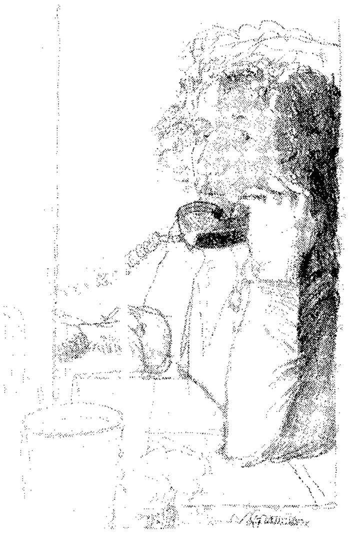
An apt last word on "American Life in American Art" is, of course, provided by Andy Warhol. The quotation next to his 1962 "Green Coca-Cola Bottles" reads: "A Coke is a Coke, and no amount of money can get you a better Coke than the one the bum on the corner is drinking. All the Cokes are the same and all the Cokes are good. Liz Taylor knows it, the President knows it, the bum knows it and you know it."

## MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

**Metropolitan Museum,** Fifth Ave. at 82nd St.—Walter Annenberg, who made a name for himself as the publisher of *TV Guide*, turned down a billion-dollar offer for his modern-art collection and chose instead the nobler path of philanthropy by bequeathing it to this museum several months ago. The gift of the collection, which had been perhaps the finest grouping of Impressionist and Post-Impressionist paintings still in private hands, sets a standard of excellence for future patrons of the arts. The exhibition begins with some exquisite small works by Fantin-Latour, followed by two rooms, devoted to Monet, van Gogh, Gauguin, and Cézanne, that would be the pride of any museum. These rooms include some of the collection's finest works, such as Monet's "Poppy Field, Argenteuil" (1875), Gauguin's "The Siesta" (189[illegible]-94), and Cézanne's "The House with the Cracked Walls" (1892-94), all of which were purchased by Annenberg in 1983 from his sister Enid Haupt. Farther on are some very good early-twentieth-century works, including Picasso's haunting "At the Lapin Agile" (1905), an important but somewhat overwrought Vuillard, a beautiful Matisse, and a very pretty Bonnard; these works, however, are not up to the same level as the great Impressionist ones. Through Oct. 13. . . . **NOTE:** The museum's roof garden, planted with nine sculptures by Rodin, is open when the weather permits. Through Oct. 27. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:15, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 8:45.)

**MUSEUM OF MODERN ART,** 11 W. 53rd St.—"Nudes," a show of fifty photographs by Lee Friedlander taken over the past twelve years. Through Oct. 8. . . . ¶ A small show of posters, catalogues, ads, and magazine covers by the Swiss graphic designer Herbert Matter (1907-1984). (Open daily, except Wednesdays, 11 to 6, and Thursday evenings until 9.)

**GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM,** Fifth Ave. at 89th St.—The museum is closed for renovation until early 1992.



*Self-portrait by Nancy Grossman*

**WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART,** Madison Ave. at 75th St.—Over the past decade it has become a near-cliché to invoke John Baldessari's influence as a teacher. As if to assault paradox—and, perhaps, ironically to embrace Baldessari's pedagogical reputation—this retrospective has been organized into eight loosely chronological, didactically labelled rooms, each of which is further equipped with its own printed, loose-leaf, lesson-cum-exam-question page. In Room 1, for example, we pluck a page with the heading "Lessons on Art and Art Making" and, looking at the wall, find "Wrong," a 1967 word-and-image painting that consists of a silk-screened picture of a man standing in front of a tree on a suburban street. " 'Wrong,' " we read, "breaks the rule that one should never take a picture of someone in front of a tree because it will look as if the tree were growing out of the person's head." It's interesting how much Baldessari eventually picked up from his ex-students and others. If the lessons of the first two rooms provide virtual blueprints for the likes of David Salle, Richard Prince, and Jenny Holzer, the last rooms declare that important teachers never stop learning. Tips from Salle, in particular, are quite obvious at the close of this show, but—more unexpectedly—so are the effects, it seems, of shaped canvases by the abstract painter Elizabeth Murray. Through Oct. 20. . . . ¶ "American Life in American Art" presents nearly a hundred and seventy twentieth-century paintings and sculptures from the museum's permanent collection. . . . ¶ The long-neglected decorative artist Hunt Diederich (1884-1953)—a contemporary of Elie Nadelman, whose work Diederich's faintly suggests—was born in Hungary, the son of a Prussian cavalry officer and a proper-Bostonian artist. After some schooling in Switzerland, he came to the States to live with his maternal grandfather, the painter William Morris Hunt; then he went out West to become a cowboy. His *animalier* sculptures, cowboyish and not, were a hit in Paris at the 1913 Salon d'Automne, where "Greyhounds" was bought by a Baron Rothschild. This high-pitched curriculum vitae—amplified by sojourns in Fascist Germany, and a crippling injury caused by a fall from scaffolding—seems to have affected his thinking. In 1947, he sent out anti-Semitic material by mail in envelopes marked "with compliments from Members of the National Institute of Arts and Letters." He was expelled from the institute, and died not long after, while working on a bas-relief for the A.S.P.C.A. headquarters in Manhattan. Diederich's art is fanciful and filigreed: wrought-iron fire screens, trivets, and candlesticks, for instance, with fox and ibex motifs. Bravo to the Whitney for this rediscovery. Through Sept. 29. (Open Tuesdays, 1 to 8; Wednesdays through Saturdays, 11 to 5; Sundays, 11 to 6.)

**BROOKLYN MUSEUM,** Eastern Parkway—"Quattrocento," a small exhibition of a few dozen early-Renaissance panel paintings from Italy, shows off another of the many fine corners of the Brooklyn Museum's vast collection. The works are all small and most of them are minor, but they cogently present the history of the quattrocento, giving a sense of its rich spread throughout northern Italy. The show begins with a charming trecento "Last Supper," attributed to Vitale de Bologne, that exhibits archaic perspective, and a marvellous triptych by Maso di Banco, one of Giotto's most gifted pupils, that in one panel depicts an elongated Christ on a blood-spattered Cross. Flemish influence is evident in a tender portrait of St. Jerome by Donato dei Bardi, and the voluminous lit-velvet drapery of Venice is represented by a depiction of St. James Major by Carlo Crivelli. A curiously stormy world view is presented by the Marchigian Lorenzo d'Alessandro da San Severino, and a mysterious sense of time standing still haunts a little "Venus and Mars" attributed to Palma Vecchio. That work, dated circa 1515, is the latest in the show. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 10 to 5.)

**AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY,** Central Park W. at 79th St.—"The Way to Independence," a show of more than five hundred artifacts dealing with the upheaval endured by three generations of Hidatsa Indians and their eventual relocation to a reservation called Independence. Through Nov. 3. . . . ¶ Thirty-five large-format color photographs of endangered North American fish, including lampreys, mud minnows, shiners, and trout. Through Sept. 22. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 8:45.)

**AMERICAN CRAFT MUSEUM,** 40 W. 53rd St.—"Frank Lloyd Wright: Preserving an Architectural Heritage" is a show of more than seventy pieces of furniture, art-glass windows, lights, and other decorative objects spanning sixty years of the artist's career. (Open daily, except Mondays, 10 to 5, and Tuesday and Friday evenings until 8.)

**ASIA SOCIETY,** Park Ave. at 70th St.—"The Here and the Hereafter: Images of Paradise in Islamic Art." This modestly scaled exhibition, organized by the Hood Museum of Dartmouth College, views Islamic art from the perspective of paradise, a central tenet of the belief system. Paradise is promised to the faithful, and its image therefore pervades Islamic decorative objects. The exhibition includes manuscripts, textiles, stelae, and ceramics, but the most compelling are the rugs. Two of them depict formal gardens. One is massive, with trees branching off from a field of interconnected canals. The other has a solid deep-blue center representing a pool. There are also some fascinating textiles, including a piece of embroidery of a heavenly gate surrounded by a fairly abstract although succulent bed of red flowers. It was made in Uzbekistan and was used to wrap more valued textiles. The objects here span a broad range of Islamic history and were made by culturally diverse Islamic

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peoples, but this is not a study in pan-Islamic art. The show is a teaser, presented in a restrained installation designed by the gimmick-meister Charles Moore. Through Sept. 8. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 11 to 6; Sundays, noon to 5.)

**Cooper-Hewitt Museum,** Fifth Ave. at 91st St.—"A Design Resource" is a rotating sampler of nearly a thousand objects drawn from the collection: old tarot cards, tapestry fragments from a few millennia ago, architectural drawings, gilt furniture mounts (including a representation of a tiny pair of human feet), locks, eighteenth-century button samples, lace, chairs of every date and style, ornately beaded boxes, and Viennese tableware. The installation, while a little deconstructively tricky upstairs, flows well, and many of the contrasts are entertaining. How can you not love an exhibition that juxtaposes a nineteenth-century birdcage in the shape of a chapel, an Egyptian funerary boat from the Middle Kingdom, and ornate copper food molds? (Open Tuesdays, 10 to 9, with no admission charge from 5 to 9; Wednesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 5; Sundays, noon to 5.)

**Jewish Museum,** at the New-York Historical Society, 170 Central Park W., at 77th St.—"Painting a Place in America: Jewish Artists in New York, 1900-45." Jewish painters and sculptors have certainly made contributions to the history of twentieth-century American art, but this is a weak idea for an exhibition, and no great historical insight is gained by the segregation. What the viewer is left with is primarily an impression of second-rate, labored art—the essentially boring heaviness of urban social realism, as typified by the Soyer brothers and provincial abstraction. But there are some delightful discoveries in the show, including a witty, Cubistic 1915 portrait of Marsden Hartley by Ben Benn, and a mythical, Old World circus scene by Benjamin Kopman, with shades of Chagall, Ensor, and Marc. Through Sept. 29. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, and Sundays, 10 to 5; Fridays, 10 to 3. Closed Sept. 10.)

**Museum of American Folk Art,** Columbus Ave. at 65th St.—"Paint, Powder, and Leaf" showcases nearly a hundred decorated objects, from tin coffeepots and cannisters to wood chests and iron fire screens. Regional styles from Maine, Connecticut, New York, and Pennsylvania are represented. Through Sept. 15. . . . ¶ A show of twenty-four quilts with floral themes, all prize-winners from this spring's Great American Quilt Festival. Through Sept. 15. . . . ¶ Forty-five narrative paintings by Harry Lieberman (1880-1983). The exhibition explores the sources of the artist's imagery, based on the lore of his Hasidic heritage in Poland. Through Sept. 22. (Open daily, 9 to 9.)

**National Academy of Design,** Fifth Ave. at 89th St.—In the exhibition "Illustrating Nature: The Art of Botany," the New York Botanical Garden's collection is represented by ninety-five watercolors, pen-and-ink drawings, books, and dried plant specimens. Through Oct. 20. (Open Tuesdays, noon to 8, with no admission charge after 5; Wednesdays through Sundays, noon to 5.)

**New York Public Library,** Fifth Ave. at 42nd St.—"Documents of Dissent," a show of books, posters, handbills, and journals from China, Tibet, the Soviet Union, the United States, and other countries. Included are the first English translation of "The Gulag Archipelago," the "Black Book of Polish Censorship," and posters by the collaborative group Guerrilla Girls. (Edna Barnes Salomon Room.). . . ¶ A display of recently acquired rare books and manuscripts, including Joseph Conrad's manuscript for "The Secret Sharer" and Washington Irving's for "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow." Through Oct. 12. (Berg Collection.) (Open Tuesdays and Wednesdays, 11 to 6; Thursdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6.)

**Isamu Noguchi Garden Museum,** 32-37 Vernon Blvd., at 33rd Road, Long Island City—Noguchi (1904-88), one of the twentieth century's singular talents, designed this oasis for more than two hundred and fifty of his sculptures. It contains a wide range of his work—from the early surrealistic biomorphic sculptures to several types of stone carvings—and documentation of his prodigious public art. The centerpiece of the museum is a peaceful, ivy-walled garden dotted with the artist's works. Through Nov. 30. (Open Wednesdays and Saturdays, 11 to 6.)

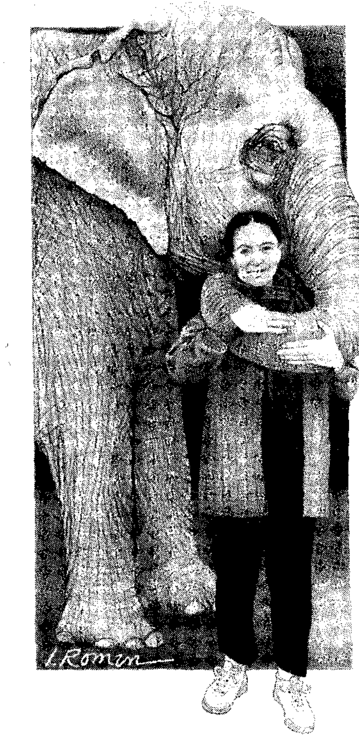
**Queens Museum of Art,** Flushing Meadow Park—"Imágenes Líricas: New Spanish Visions." An astonishingly rich and ambitious art world has sprung up in post-Franco Spain, with seven brand-new museums devoted, at least in part, to living artists; a spirited major international art fair; an impressive array of exhibitions and collections; and a network of dozens of thriving, serious art galleries. This exhibition presents eight artists who the curators believe are the most interesting to have emerged in this newly opened environment. However, the works, which do not conform to any one trend, suffer by and large from an academic cosmopolitanism, even as they express unique qualities of Catalan, Moorish, or Spanish culture. José María Sicilia, the most widely noted of the batch, is a gifted painter who seeks to represent the fleeting and the abstract, but all too often his works seem programmatic. Juan Uslé is perhaps even more gifted with a brush, but his quest for self-expression, like that of the more lyrical Juan Carlos Savater, who plays Dove to Uslé's Ryder, is without issues or viewpoint. Perejaume is the most playful artist here. His neo-conceptual collages of paint and postcards play with image and abstraction, reproduction and art, in entertaining, if somewhat familiar, ways. And his postcard rack, which is filled with mirrors instead of vacation memories, examines issues of landscape, place, and representation crisply and intelligently. Through Sept. 8. (Open Tuesdays, 10 to 8; Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5; Saturdays and Sundays, noon to 5.)

## GALLERIES

(Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.)

**Joyce Kozloff**—For the past decade, Joyce Kozloff has been one of the most prolific and successful public artists around. But since all of her commissions have been outside of New York, her work has remained virtually unknown here. Now, however, one half of a massive ceramic-tile mural she created for Los Angeles' new mass-transit system is on view in a temporary gallery space, before it gets shipped and installed. Although Kozloff is known for bright-colored, elaborately patterned murals, this work, a celebration of old science-fiction movies, depicts a cavalcade of characters in black-and-white. Many of its sources are obscure films, the identification of which should challenge cultists, and the mural is so rich in detail that it will assure the bored commuter endless viewing pleasure. Sept. 4-8. (152 Wooster St.)

**"Africa Explores: Twentieth-Century African Art"**—The great African sculpture that modernist artists and European collectors valued and that shaped our idea of African art is relegated in this show to the final room, where it serves as a startling epitaph for traditions that no longer exist. The exhibition is an attempt to reverse the commonly held belief that contemporary African art is in the doldrums. Although only some of the work is successful, the show is always provocative and often entertaining. The material is organized into five categories—"traditional," "new functional," "urban," "international," and "extinct"—which are used to distinguish, for example, paintings made as "signs" from those made as "art." Perhaps the most inventive works are the Pop coffins of Ghana's Kane Kwei. One, made to transport a taxi-fleet owner to his final resting place, is in the form of a Mercedes-Benz; another resembles an onion. There are lively comparisons here, such as that between Magdalene Odundo's elegant, very modernistic long-necked ceramic vessels and traditional ritualistic statues whose quirky figuration seems somehow related. Painting, a relatively new form for the continent, seems to have reached its most inventive level in Zaire, with the naïve pictographs of Albert Lubaki and the charming political narratives of the self-taught Chéri Samba (including his hilarious "Battle with the Mosquitos"). The catalogue is dense and rich, with everything from photographs of trucks, grave markers, and chiefs' houses to an essay on "Afro-kitsch." Through Dec. 29. (Center for African Art, 54 E. 68th St. Open daily, except Mondays; opens Sundays at noon.)



*Photographer Mary Ellen Mark*

**"Rethinking Space (II), Certain Uncertainty"**—Art galleries seem to have pretty much abandoned the mounting of season-end new-talent shows, but this exhibition, curated by Kenny Schachter and art dealer Sandra Gering, and set in the unlikely location of The Lobby Gallery (in the same building as Deutsche Bank, which sponsored the show), features sculptures by fourteen emergent artists. The show's more interesting works include Fred Tomaselli's gargantuan chandelier made of illuminated beer cans, with a bag of white pills swinging in the center like an obsessive plumb bob; an anti-architectural sculpture, by Simon Ungers, consisting of a triangle of rope attached to the gallery's soaring ceiling and tethered to a heavy steel cube on the floor; and a kind of double image of conformity, by Janine Antoni, that consists of a computer workstation in which every object has been sheathed in blue seersucker, except for a length of human hair. The only non-sculptural work is by the Dutch artist Vulto; it consists of several pieces of suspended fabric that have smoked patterns on them—the residue of an elaborate "event" involving fire and shrouds. "I wish I could be a painter," reads his statement accompanying the current exhibition. So do we. Through Sept. 13. (31 W. 52nd St. Open Mondays through Fridays, 9:30 to 6.)

**Group Show**—This show of so-called art furniture focusses on the work of eighteen practitioners of the craft. The artists have gone to great lengths to entertain the eye with what one presumes are intended to be witty collectibles, and if their works were more soulful they could be to interior decoration what garden follies are to architecture. The pieces, however, are death by luxury—the playfulness of funk ceramics deadened by an addiction to the most garishly exotic woods and crafty tomfoolery. One of the practitioners, Wendell Castle, made some truly interesting high-style furniture in the sixties, much of it in plastic, but in recent years he has indulged his appetite for ultradecadent conversation pieces whose most interesting characteristics are the components lifted from Biedermeier and Ruhlmann. Perhaps there is social commentary somewhere in the show, but it is unclear how ironic the objects are intended to be. Through Sept. 20. (Joseph, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. Open Mondays, except Labor Day; closed Saturdays.)

**Short List**—**PETAH COYNE,** Shainman, 560 Broadway (starts Sept. 5); **NANCY GROSSMAN,** Exit Art, 578 Broadway (starts Sept. 7); **STEPHANIE KIRSCHEN-COLE,** De Nagy, 41 W. 57th St. (starts Sept. 5).

## PHOTOGRAPHY

LAST week, the covers of *Time* and *Newsweek* were basically the same. Both showed a photograph of Boris Yeltsin with his arm up in the air, in a gesture symbolizing victory. This kind of duplication happens a lot in news photography. Sometimes it's just a result of formulaic thinking that of all the images to come out of a historic event the ones that are chosen for publication turn out to be similar from magazine to magazine, and from newspaper to newspaper. At other times such "coincidences" occur not because of standardization or chance, but because a certain kind of image seems to go like an arrow straight to the heart of an event. In the case of this latest "Russian Revolution," it is not the image of a smiling Yeltsin with his arm raised that strikes us as the most eloquent possible expression of the meaning of recent events in the Soviet Union. Rather, it's all those photographs of crowds filling the streets and squares that have the most feeling. They're images without leading men and women—mere expanses of unrecognizable faces. They're icons of spirit, and they capture something that is very hard to express in a photograph: a sense of change. That's what makes these particular crowd pictures so magnetic, in comparison to, say, photographs of spectators at a football game. Crowd pictures are like Rorschach tests—our interpretation of the images has a lot to do with our own experience of history. Today, a photograph of an S.S. rally constitutes a criminal image. Who can tell what meanings these new and moving Soviet crowd pictures may take on in the future?

**Group Show**—An exhibition full of wonderful photographs, more than half of them from the twenties and thirties, by both well-known and more obscure photographers. A sophisticated level of connoisseurship is evident in the choices that have been made here, and there's no theme to the exhibition at all; this is a show that's all about the pleasure of looking at pictures and the satisfaction one can get from the experience. Through Sept. 20. (Houk Friedman, 1094 Madison Ave., at 82nd St.)

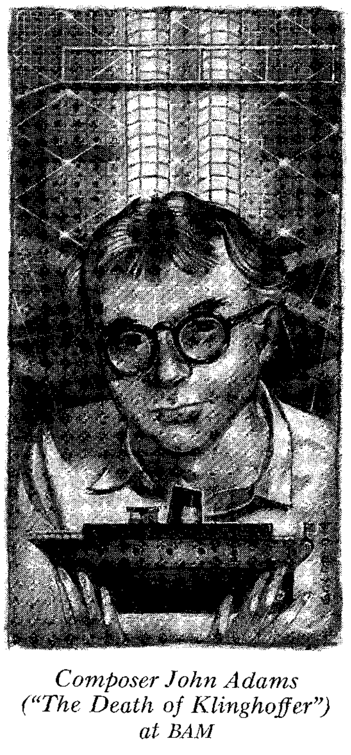
**Short List**—**MARY ELLEN MARK** and **ROBERT CAPA,** International Center of Photography Midtown, Sixth Ave. at 43rd St. (open daily, except Mondays, 11 to 6, and Tuesday evenings until 8; starts Sept. 6).

## MUSIC

WE aren't among the many Americans who have already seen "The Death of Klinghoffer" in Europe, but we share the feelings of the many who are excited that an American opera has generated such interest there. Has American opera—so long wished into being, and, more recently, in some quarters, mourned as an idea that was never meant to find fruition—arrived at last, unexpectedly and late, on the stages of Brussels and Lyons? Here are John Adams, a composer more or less without European roots; Alice Goodman, a young librettist reared in American English; and Peter Sellars, that curiously brilliant product of Harvard and television (as stage director and, one gathers, creative coach), with their team of American singers (who are, even more important, American actors, children too of our television). The style of the music could not be more American, since it comes from minimalism, which comes from California and from rock. The subject matter is also American: both the particular subject of our nation's convoluted, layered involvement in the agonies of the Middle East and the team's idea of choosing operatic subjects from the headlines.

Of course, American opera has been here all along: it takes peculiar contortions of thought to deny that the "musical comedy"—for all that it is commercial, for all that it uses different kinds of voices, for all (and here is the main impediment) that it has grown alongside an antiquarian opera tradition instead of supplanting its predecessors—is an American continuation of all the essential ideas of opera. But one of the many difficulties besetting American opera has been the comparative paucity of works (in either strand of its development) whose intellectual and musical aims could be defended convincingly to the part of opera's constituency that takes those things seriously. Are Adams, Goodman, and Sellars the people to give us such works?

The main reason we await "The Death of Klinghoffer" (beginning September 5 at BAM) with such interest is that, with respect to the group's first opera, "Nixon in China," we answer the above question unhesitatingly in the affirmative. For us, it is a piece that has already stood a very short "test of time," and so we watch with eagerness as its creators address the test of continuation and growth in their work.



*Composer John Adams*
*("The Death of Klinghoffer")*
*at BAM*

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*Orquesta de la Luz at the Palladium*

## OPERA

**New York City Opera**—**THE MOST HAPPY FELLA,** Frank Loesser's vintage-1956 Broadway musical about problematic liaisons in the California wine country, which made history by expanding its genre to nearly operatic proportions. With Elizabeth Walsh, Karen Ziémba, Elaine Bonazzi, Louis Quilico, Burke Moses, Lara Teeter, and Arthur Rubin; conducted by Chris Nance. (Sept. 4 at 8 and Sept. 8 at 2.). . . **MADAME BUTTERFLY,** with Elizabeth Holleque, Robynne Redmon, Stephen O'Mara, and Jeffrey Kneebone; Chris Nance. (Sept. 5 at 8.). . . **THE CUNNING LITTLE VIXEN,** a revival (in English) of Janáček's bittersweet operatic fable, based on a Czech comic strip; with Kathryn Gamberoni, Cynthia Rose, and Jan Opalach; Christopher Keene. (Sept. 6 and Sept. 11 at 8.). . . **LE NOZZE DI FIGARO,** with Elizabeth Hynes, Maureen O'Flynn, Kathryn Gamberoni, Dean Peterson, and William Stone; Scott Bergeson. (Sept. 7 at 2.). . . ***CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA*** and **PAGLIACCI,** with RoseMarie Freni, Bronwyn Thomas, and Vincenzo Scuderi (in the former); and Pamela South, Antonio Barasorda, and Sigmund Cowan (in the latter). Richard Bradshaw conducting both. (Sept. 7 and Sept. 10 at 8.) (New York State Theatre. 870-5570.)

**"The Death of Klinghoffer"**—Those who followed from afar the hijacking of the cruise ship Achille Lauro, in 1985, can partake of an up-close replay, as interpreted by composer John Adams, librettist Alice Goodman, director Peter Sellars, and choreographer Mark Morris. Singers include Sheila Nadler, Sanford Sylvan, and James Maddalena. Kent Nagano conducts the Brooklyn Philharmonic Orchestra. (Brooklyn Academy of Music, 30 Lafayette Ave. 1-718 636-4100. Sept. 5 at 7, and Sept. 7 and Sept. 9 at 8. Through Sept. 13.)

**Opera Ebony**—Presenting "Così fan Tutte"—fully staged and sung in English—conducted by Wayne Sanders. (Davis Hall, City College, Convent Ave. at 134th St. 650-7100. Sept. 8 at 4.)

## CONCERTS

**New York Philharmonic**—The opening concert of the orchestra's season, which will run through May 23. Kurt Masur, the orchestra's new music director, conducts two brief works by John Adams, the second set of Copland's "Old American Songs" (with baritone Thomas Hampson, in his début with the orchestra), and Bruckner's Seventh Symphony. (Avery Fisher Hall. 875-5030. Sept. 11 at 8.)

**Bargemusic**—Pianist William Tritt plays a Bach partita; violinist Ik-Hwan Bae joins him for a Beethoven sonata; and cellist Jian Wang rounds out the ensemble for Beethoven's Trio, Op. 1, No. 2. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 1-718 624-4061. Sept. 5 at 7:30 and Sept. 8 at 4.)

## JAZZ/POP/ROCK
## PERSONAL APPEARANCES

**Allman Brothers Band**—*With Blues Traveler* on Sept. 3. (Jones Beach Theatre. 1-516 221-1000. Sept. 3-4 at 7.)

**Sting**—Madison Square Garden. 465-6000. Sept. 5 at 8. . . . ¶ Jones Beach Theatre. Sept. 7-8 at 8.

**Orquesta de la Luz** and **El Gran Combo**—Palladium, 126 E. 14th St. 473-7171. Sept. 5 at 9.

**Manhattan Transfer**—Jones Beach Theatre. Sept. 6 at 8.

**Caetano Veloso**—Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St. 840-2824. Sept. 7 at 8.

**Grateful Dead**—*Madison Square Garden.* Sept. 8-10 at 7:30. Through Sept. 18.

**Branford Marsalis**—Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800. Sept. 11-15 at 8.

# SPORTS

## HOME TEAMS

**Mets**—Vs. the Houston Astros, Sept. 2 at 1:40 and Sept. 3-4 at 7:40. . . . ¶ Vs. the *Atlanta* Braves, Sept. 6 at 7:40, and Sept. 7-8 at 1:40. . . . ¶ Vs. the Montreal Expos, Sept. 9 at 7:40 and Sept. 10 at 1:40.

**Yankees**—Away until they meet the Boston Red Sox on Sept. 12.

**Giants**—Vs. the San Francisco 49ers, Sept. 2 at 9 P.M. . . . ¶ Vs. the Los Angeles Rams, Sept. 8 at 1.

(The Mets play at Shea Stadium, 1-718 507-8499; the Yankees play at Yankee Stadium, 293-6000; and the Giants play at Giants Stadium, the Meadowlands, 1-201 935-8111.)

## RACING

**Horses**—At Belmont: Daily, except Tuesdays, at 1. . . . At the Meadowlands: Tuesdays through Saturdays at 7:30. Starts Sept. 4. . . . At Monmouth Park, Oceanport, N.J.: Weekdays at 1:05. Through Sept. 2. . . . **TROTTING** at Yonkers Raceway: Mondays through Saturdays at 8, Tuesdays at 1, and Sundays at 6. . . . At Saratoga Raceway, Saratoga Springs: Wednesdays through Saturdays at 7:45.

## CHAMPIONSHIP—TENNIS

**U.S. Open**—The best players in the world will be on the courts at the U.S.T.A. National Tennis Center in Flushing Meadow, through Sept. 8. For information about match times and tickets, call 1-718 271-5100.

# ABOVE AND BEYOND

***Tribute***—*This year marks* the hundredth anniversary of the birth of Irish fiddler Michael Coleman; and, in honor of the occasion, the New York Irish History Roundtable, the Sligo Men's Association, and the Michael Coleman branch of Comhaltas Ceoltoiri Eireann (a traditional-music organization) have joined forces to present a biographical lecture, with slides, and a concert of fiddle music from the Coleman repertoire. (Washington Square Church, 135 W. 4th St. S[illegible]. 7 at 3. No tickets necessary.)

**A Reading**—Russell Banks reads from his new novel, "Sweet Hereafter." (Endicott Booksellers, 450 Columbus Ave., at 81st St. Sept. 11 at 8. No tickets necessary.)

**Walks**—Sponsored by Citywalks. Sept 7 at 1: A tour that takes in both the bourgeois and bohemian aspects of Greenwich Village. . . . Sept. 8 at 1: A walk downtown, in the environs of City Hall. (For reservations and information, call 989-2456.). . . ¶ Sponsored by Adventure on a Shoestring. Sept. 7 at 2: A walking tour of SoHo. . . . Sept. 8 at 3: A walk up Millionaires' Mile, the section of Fifth Avenue that runs from 59th to 79th Street. (For *reservations and information, call 265-2663.*)

**Memoranda**—Labor Day is Sept. 2. . . . ¶ The final days of the Washington Square Outdoor Art Exhibit are Sept. 7-8, from noon to sundown.

# GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

## THE MOVIE HOUSES

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| 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | | | |

FILMS ACCOMPANIED BY A DAGGER ARE DESCRIBED IN THE "IN BRIEF" SECTION, STARTING ON PAGE 18.

*The 1941 comic melodrama "Sullivan's Travels" (playing September 9 and 12 at the Museum of Modern Art) is the ultimate Preston Sturges movie—it sums up his attitudes and defines his strengths and limitations. That master of masculine silliness Joel McCrea plays John L. Sullivan, a Hollywood director who decides to turn his back on a career filled with smash-hit farces and make a socially conscious Depression epic called "Oh Brother, Where Art Thou?" Sullivan poses as a penniless drifter to experience suffering firsthand. No matter how hard he struggles to get away from Hollywood, that's where he keeps winding up. The kindest person he meets is "the Girl" (the irresistibly deadpan Veronica Lake), a would-be starlet who yearns to act for Lubitsch. The action in "Sullivan's Travels" is riotous. It takes off like a straight arrow, then whips around corners and stabs our hero in the backside.*

*Sullivan does get his taste of suffering, first through a sojourn in hobo life, then during a horrifying stint on a Southern chain gang. Watching his fellow-convicts belly-laugh their way through a Mickey Mouse cartoon, he learns to respect his tinselled craft. But it would be a mistake to think that Sturges was advocating escapist entertainment as the be-all, end-all of moviemaking. This film proves mostly that it's the be-all, end-all for Sullivan. The biggest flaw is Sturges's treatment of the underclass. When Sullivan finally rubs worn elbows with the poor, Sturges renders them pictorially, even silently—which indicates his own uneasiness with the subject, since his best characters live through words. It's as if poverty has robbed the destitute of ingenuity and imagination (Sturges's favorite qualities). But this failing doesn't undercut the movie's over-all vision. Sullivan demonstrates what is most important to Sturges: not merely success or fame, though he adored them both, but embracing the right dream.*

### EAST SIDE

**Angelika Film Center,** 18 W. Houston St. (995-2000)
Theatre 1: "Slacker" (directed by Richard Linklater).
Theatre 2: "City Slickers" (†).
Theatre 3: "La Femme Nikita" (Luc Besson; in French), with Anne Parillaud, Jean-Hugues Anglade, Tcheky Karyo, and Jeanne Moreau.
Theatre 4: The 23rd International Tournée of Animation.
Theatre 5: "An Angel at My Table" Jane Campion), with Kerry Fox.
Theatre 6: "Trust" (†).

**Public Theatre,** 425 Lafayette St. (598-7171)
Sept. 2: Theatre closed.
Sept. 3-5: A festival of documentaries and short films from Latin America.
From Sept. 6: "New Jack City" (†); and "La Dolce Vita" (1960, Federico Fellini; in Italian), with Marcello Mastroianni and Anita Ekberg.

**Movieland 8th Street Triplex,** 36 E. 8th. (477-6600)
Theatre 1: "Barton Fink" (†).
Theatre 2: "Terminator 2: Judgment Day" (†).
Theatre 3: "Barton Fink" (†).

**Loews Village Theatre VII,** 3rd Ave. at 11th. (982-0400)
Theatre 1: "Thelma & Louise" (Ridley Scott), with Susan Sarandon, Geena Davis, Harvey Keitel, Brad Pitt, Christopher McDonald, Michael Madsen, Timothy Carhart, and Stephen Tobolowsky.
Theatre 2: "Defenseless" (Martin Campbell), with Barbara Hershey, Sam Shepard, and Mary Beth Hurt.
Theatre 3: "Boyz N the Hood" (†).
Theatre 4: "The Pope Must Die" (Peter Richardson), with Robbie Coltrane, Beverly D'Angelo, and Herbert Lom.
Theatre 5: "Dead Again" (†).
Theatre 6: "Boyz N the Hood" (†).
Theatre 7: "Dead Again" (†).

**Cinema Village 12th Street,** 22 E. 12th. (924-3363)
"Eating" (Henry Jaglom).

**Village East Cinemas,** 2nd Ave. at 12th. (529-6799)
Theatre 1: "The Miracle" (†).
Theatre 2: "The Doctor" (†).
Theatre 3: "One Hand Don't Clap" (Kavery Dutta), with Lord Kitchener and Calypso Rose.
Theatre 4: "Naked Tango" (Leonard Schrader), with Mathilda May, Fernando Ray, Esai Morales, and Vincent D'Onofrio.
Theatre 5: "True Identity" (Charles Lane), with Lenny Henry, Frank Langella, and Charles Lane.
Theatre 6: Through Sept. 5: "Everybody's Fine" (Giuseppe Tornatore, in Italian), with Marcello Mastroianni. From Sept. 6: "Blood and Concrete" (Jeffrey Reiner), with Billy Zane, Jennifer Beals, and Darren McGavin.
Theatre 7: (Matinées only) "101 Dalmatians" (†); and (evenings only) "Straight Out of Brooklyn" (Matty Rich).

**Cinema Village 3rd Avenue,** between 12th and 13th. (505-7320)
"Festival of Animation 1991."

**Loews 19th Street East 6,** B'way at 19th. (260-8000)
Theatre 1: "Regarding Henry" (†).
Theatre 2: "Harley Davidson and the Marlboro Man" (Simon Wincer), with Mickey Rourke and Don Johnson.
Theatre 3: "The Naked Gun 2½: The Smell of Fear" (†).
Theatre 4: "Terminator 2: Judgment Day" (†).
Theatre 5: "Terminator 2: Judgment Day" (†).
Theatre 6: "Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves" (Kevin Reynolds), with Kevin Costner, Alan Rickman, Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio, Morgan Freeman, Christian Slater, Nick Brimble, Michael McShane, Michael Wincott, and Brian Blessed.

**Gramercy,** Lexington at 23rd. (475-1660)
"The Doctor" (†).

**Bay Cinema,** 2nd Ave. at 32nd. (679-0160)
"Child's Play 3" (Jack Bender).

**Murray Hill Cinemas,** 160 E. 34th. (689-6548)
Theatre 1: (Matinées only) "101 Dalmatians" (†); and (evenings only) "Thelma & Louise" (Ridley Scott), with Susan Sarandon, Geena Davis, Harvey Keitel, Brad Pitt, Christopher McDonald, Michael Madsen, Timothy Carhart, and Stephen Tobolowsky.
Theatre 2: "True Identity" (Charles Lane), with Lenny Henry, Frank Langella, and Charles Lane.
Theatre 3: "Doc Hollywood" (†).
Theatre 4: "Boyz N the Hood" (†).

**Loews 34th Street Showplace,** 238 E. 34th. (532-5544)
Theatre 1: "Regarding Henry" (†).
Theatre 2: "Dead Again" (†).
Theatre 3: "Harley Davidson and the Marlboro Man" (Simon Wincer), with Mickey Rourke and Don Johnson.

**34th St. East,** 241 E. 34th. (683-0255)
"Hot Shots!" (†).

**Eastside Cinema,** 3rd Ave. at 55th. (755-3020)
Through Sept. 5: "La Femme Nikita" (Luc Besson; in French), with Anne Parillaud, Jean-Hugues Anglade, Tcheky Karyo, and Jeanne Moreau.
From Sept. 6: To be announced.

**Sutton I and 2,** 3rd Ave. at 57th. (759-1411)
Theatre 1: "Doc Hollywood" (†).
Theatre 2: "True Identity" (Charles Lane), with Lenny Henry, Frank Langella, and Charles Lane.

**Gotham Cinema,** 3rd Ave. at 58th. (759-2262)
"Hot Shots!" (†).

**Plaza,** 42 E. 58th. (355-3320)
"City Slickers" (†).

**Manhattan Twin,** 3rd Ave. at 59th. (935-6420)
Theatre 1: "Child's Play 3" (Jack Bender).
Theatre 2: "Double Impact" (Sheldon Lettich), with Jean-Claude Van Damme.

**59th Street East Cinema,** 239 E. 59th. (759-4630)
"Pure Luck" (Nadia Tass), with Martin Short and Danny Glover.

**Baronet and Coronet,** 3rd Ave. at 59th. (355-1663)
Theatre 1: "Defenseless" (Martin Campbell), with Barbara Hershey, Sam Shepard, and Mary Beth Hurt.
Theatre 2: "Barton Fink" (†).

**Cinema I, Cinema II, and Cinema 3rd Avenue,** 3rd Ave. at 60th. (753-6022)
Theatre 1: "The Doctor" (†).
Theatre 2: "Naked Tango" (Leonard Schrader), with Mathilda May, Fernando Ray, Esai Morales, and Vincent D'Onofrio.
Theatre 3: (Matinées only) "101 Dalmatians" (†); and (evenings only) "The Miracle" (†).

**Gemini I and 2,** 2nd Ave. at 64th. (832-1670)
Theatre 1: "Regarding Henry" (†).
Theatre 2: "Terminator 2: Judgment Day" (†).

**Beekman,** 2nd Ave. at 66th. (737-2622)
"The Commitments" (†).

**Loews New York Twin,** 2nd Ave. at 67th. (744-7339)
Theatre 1: "Dead Again" (†).
Theatre 2: Through Sept. 5: "Harley Davidson and the Marlboro Man" (Simon Wincer), with Mickey Rourke and Don Johnson. From Sept. 6: "Crooked Hearts" (Michael Bortman), with Jennifer Jason Leigh, Peter Coyote, Vincent D'Onofrio, and Peter Berg.

**68th St. Playhouse,** 3rd Ave. at 68th. (734-0302)
"The Story of Boys and Girls" (Pupi Avati, in Italian).

**Loews Tower East,** 3rd Ave. at 71st. (879-1313)
"The Pope Must Die" (Peter Richardson), with Robbie Coltrane, Beverly D'Angelo, and Herbert Lom.

**U. A. East,** 1st Ave. at 85th. (249-5100)
"Dead Again" (†).

**Park & 86th Street Cinemas,** 125 E. 86th. (534-1880)
Theatre 1: "Child's Play 3" (Jack Bender).
Theatre 2: "Hot Shots!" (†).

**86th Street East Twin,** 3rd Ave. at 86th. (249-1144)
Theatre 1: "True Identity" (Charles Lane), with Lenny Henry, Frank Langella, and Charles Lane.
Theatre 2: "Boyz N the Hood" (†).

### WEST SIDE

**Film Forum,** 209 W. Houston St. (727-8110)
Theatre 1: Through Sept. 3: "The Yen Family" (1988, directed by Yojiri Takita; in Japanese). From Sept. 4: "Swan Lake—The Zone" (1990, Yuri Illienko; in Ukrainian).
Theatre 2: See listings under Revival Houses.
Theatre 3: "Paris Is Burning" (†).

**Waverly I and 2,** 6th Ave. at 3rd. (929-8037)
Theatre 1: "Harley Davidson and the Marlboro Man" (Simon Wincer), with Mickey Rourke and Don Johnson.
Theatre 2: "Double Impact" (Sheldon

## MOVIE HOUSES—Cont'd

Lettich), with Jean-Claude Van Damme.

**8th St. Playhouse,** 52 W. 8th. (674-6515)
"Jungle Fever" (Spike Lee), with Wesley Snipes and Annabella Sciorra.

**Art Greenwich Twin,** Greenwich Ave. at 12th. (929-3350)
Theatre 1: "Hot Shots!" (†).
Theatre 2: "Child's Play 3" (Jack Bender).

**Quad Cinema,** 34 W. 13th. (255-8800)
Theatre 1: "Truly, Madly, Deeply" (†).
Theatre 2: "The Dark Backward" (Adam Rifkin), with Judd Nelson, Bill Paxton, Wayne Newton, Lara Flyn Boyle, James Caan, and Rob Lowe.
Theatre 3: "My Father's Glory" (Yves Robert, in French), with Julien Ciamaca.
Theatre 4: "Truth or Dare" (†).

**Chelsea Cinemas,** 260 W. 23rd. (691-4744)
Theatre 1: "Dead Again" (†).
Theatre 2: "Hot Shots!" (†).
Theatre 3: "The Commitments" (†).
Theatre 4: "Defenseless" (Martin Campbell), with Barbara Hershey, Sam Shepard, and Mary Beth Hurt.
Theatre 5: "Boyz N the Hood" (†).
Theatre 6: "The Commitments" (†).
Theatre 7: "Doc Hollywood" (†).
Theatre 8: "Pure Luck" (Nadia Tass), with Martin Short and Danny Glover.
Theatre 9: "Double Impact" (Sheldon Lettich), with Jean-Claude Van Damme.

**23rd St. West Triplex,** 333 W. 23rd. (989-0060)
Theatre 1: "Child's Play 3" (Jack Bender).
Theatre 2: "Child's Play 3."
Theatre 3: "True Identity" (Charles Lane), with Lenny Henry, Frank Langella, and Charles Lane.

**Guild,** 33 W. 50th. (757-2406)
"The Pope Must Die" (Peter Richardson), with Robbie Coltrane, Beverly D'Angelo, and Herbert Lom.

**Worldwide Cinemas,** 50th St. between 8th and 9th Aves. (246-1583)
Theatre 1: "Tatie Danielle" (Etienne Chatiliez; in French), with Tsilla Chelton.
Theatre 2: "Child's Play 3" (Jack Bender).
Theatre 3: "City Slickers" (†).
Theatre 4: "Regarding Henry" (†).
Theatre 5: "The Naked Gun 2½: The Smell of Fear" (†).
Theatre 6: "Thelma & Louise" (Ridley Scott), with Susan Sarandon, Geena Davis, Harvey Keitel, Brad Pitt, Christopher McDonald, Michael Madsen, Timothy Carhart, and Stephen Tobolowsky.

**Ziegfeld,** 141 W. 54th. (765-7600)
"The Commitments" (†).

**Loews Festival,** 6 W. 57th. (307-7856)
"The Naked Gun 2½: The Smell of Fear" (†).

**57th St. Playhouse,** 110 W. 57th. (581-7360)
"Pastime" (Robin B. Armstrong), with William Russ and Glenn Plummer.

**Carnegie Hall Cinemas,** 7th Ave. between 56th and 57th. (265-2520)
Theatre 1: "Barton Fink" (†).
Theatre 2: "Barton Fink" (†).

**Loews Fine Arts,** 4 W. 58th. (980-5656)
"My Mother's Castle" (Yves Robert, in French), with Julien Ciamaca.

**Cinema 3,** 2 W. 59th. (752-5959)
"Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves" (Kevin Reynolds), with Kevin Costner, Alan Rickman, Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio, Morgan Freeman, Christian Slater, Nick Brimble, Michael McShane, Michael Wincott, and Brian Blessed.

**Loews Paramount,** B'way at 61st. (247-5070)
"The Doctor" (†).

**62nd & Broadway,** 62 W. 62nd. (265-7466)
"The Commitments" (†).

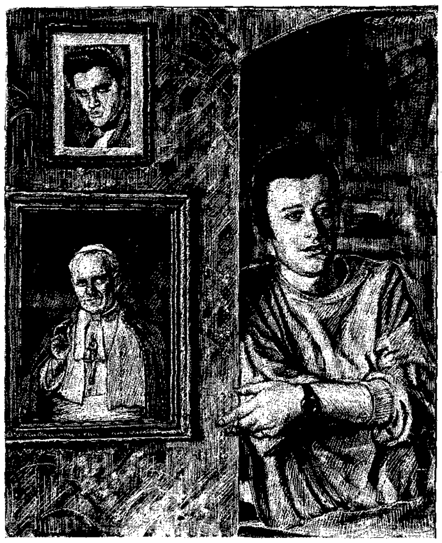
**Lincoln Plaza 1, 2, and 3,** B'way at 63rd. (757-2280)
Theatre 1: "Uranus" (Claude Berri, in French), with Jean-Pierre Marielle, Philippe Noiret, Michel Blanc, Gérard Desarthe, Gérard Depardieu, and Daniel Prevost.
Theatre 2: "Europa Europa" (†).
Theatre 3: "Paris Is Burning" (†).

**Regency,** B'way at 67th. (724-3700)
"Hot Shots!" (†).

**Loews 84th Street Sixplex,** B'way at 84th. (877-3600)
Theatre 1: "Harley Davidson and the Marlboro Man" (Simon Wincer), with Mickey Rourke and Don Johnson.
Theatre 2: "The Pope Must Die" (Peter Richardson), with Robbie Coltrane, Beverly D'Angelo, and Herbert Lom.
Theatre 3: "Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves" (Kevin Reynolds), with Kevin Costner, Alan Rickman, Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio, Morgan Freeman, Christian Slater, Nick Brimble, Michael McShane, Michael Wincott, and Brian Blessed.
Theatre 4: "Dead Again" (†).
Theatre 5: "Terminator 2: Judgment Day" (†).
Theatre 6: "Doc Hollywood" (†).

**Metro Cinema 1 and 2,** B'way at 99th. (222-1200)
Theatre 1: "Child's Play 3" (Jack Bender).
Theatre 2: "Defenseless" (Martin Campbell), with Barbara Hershey, Sam Shepard, and Mary Beth Hurt.

**Olympia I and II,** B'way at 107th. (865-8128)
Theatre 1: "True Identity" (Charles Lane), with Lenny Henry, Frank Langella, and Charles Lane.
Theatre 2: (Separate admissions) "Boyz N the Hood" (†); and "Double Impact" (Sheldon Lettich), with Jean-Claude Van Damme.



*Robert Arkins in "The Commitments"*

## TIMES SQUARE AREA

**Criterion Center,** B'way at 44th. (354-0900)
Theatre 1: "Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves" (directed by Kevin Reynolds), with Kevin Costner, Alan Rickman, Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio, Morgan Freeman, Christian Slater, Nick Brimble, Michael McShane, Michael Wincott, and Brian Blessed.
Theatre 2: "Terminator 2: Judgment Day" (†).
Theatre 3: "Defenseless" (Martin Campbell), with Barbara Hershey, Sam Shepard, and Mary Beth Hurt.
Theatre 4: "Boyz N the Hood" (†).
Theatre 5: "Hot Shots!" (†).
Theatre 6: (Matinées only) "Bingo!" (Matthew Robbins); and (evenings only) "Point Break" (Kathryn Bigelow), with Patrick Swayze, Keanu Reeves, Gary Busey, and Lori Petty.

**Embassy 1,** B'way at 46th. (302-0494)
"True Identity" (Charles Lane), with Lenny Henry, Frank Langella, and Charles Lane.

**Embassy 2, 3, and 4,** 7th Ave. at 47th. (730-7262)
Theatre 1: "Harley Davidson and the Marlboro Man" (Simon Wincer), with Mickey Rourke and Don Johnson.
Theatre 2: "Body Parts" (Eric Red), with Jeff Fahey.
Theatre 3: (Separate admissions) "Jungle Fever" (Spike Lee), with Wesley Snipes and Annabella Sciorra; and "Do the Right Thing" (†).

**Loews Astor Plaza,** 44th St. at B'way. (869-8340)
"Dead Again" (†).

**National Twin,** B'way at 44th. (869-0950)
Theatre 1: "Double Impact" (Sheldon Lettich), with Jean-Claude Van Damme.
Theatre 2: "Child's Play 3" (Jack Bender).

**West Side Cinema 1 and 2,** 7th Ave. at 48th. (398-1720)
Theatre 1: "Straight Out of Brooklyn" (Matty Rich).
Theatre 2: "Doc Hollywood" (†).

## REVIVAL HOUSES

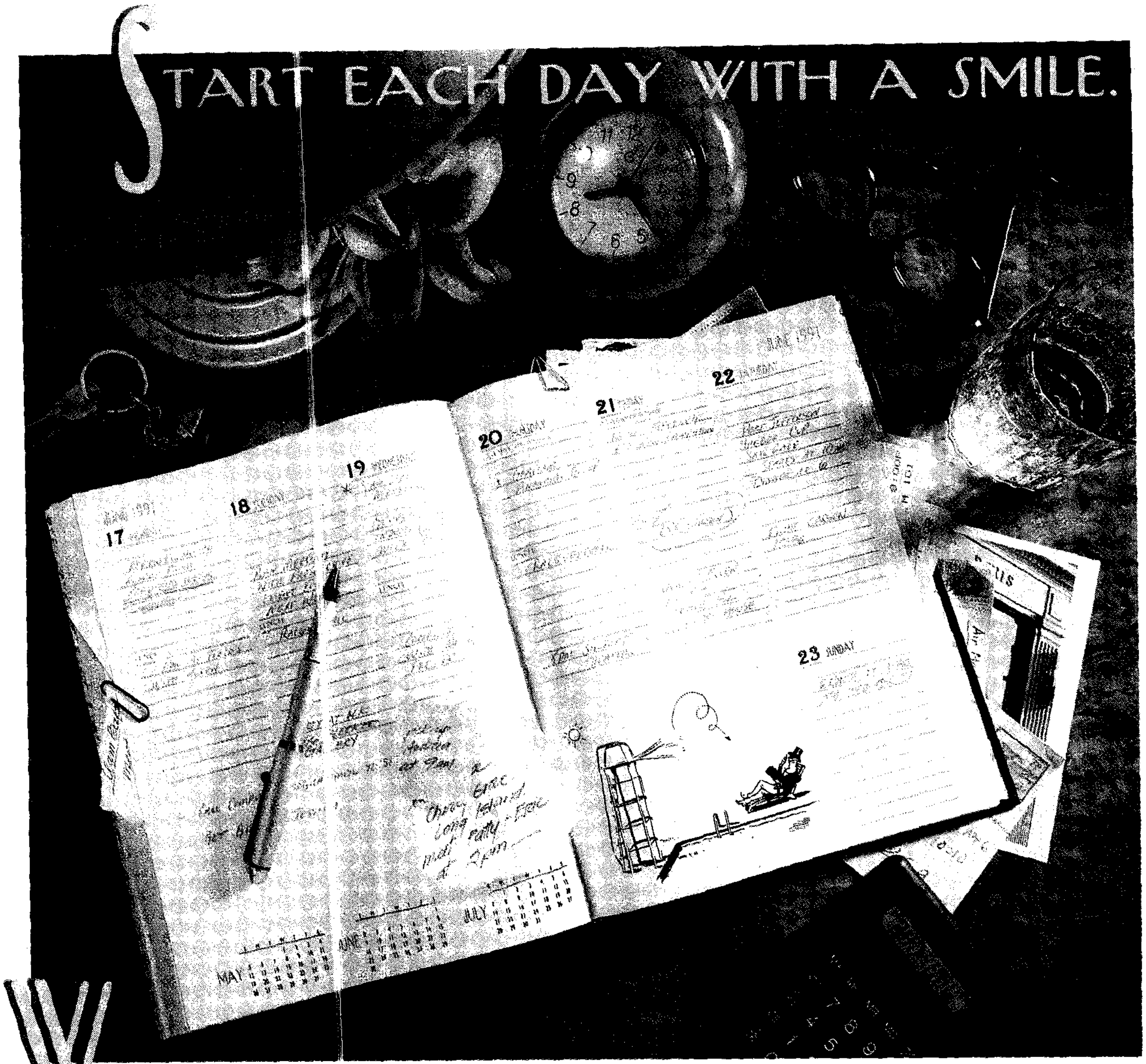
**Biograph Cinema,** 225 W. 57th. (582-4582)
Through Sept. 7: "The Wild Child" (1970, directed by François Truffaut; in French); and "Small Change" (1976, Truffaut; in French).
Sept. 8-9: "Ginger and Fred" (†) and "The Night of the Shooting Stars" (†).
Sept. 10-11: "Veronika Voss" (1982, Rainer Werner Fassbinder; in German), with Rosel Zech; and "Circle of Deceit" (1982, Volker Schlöndorff; in German), with Bruno Ganz and Hanna Schygulla.

**Film Forum 2,** 209 W. Houston St. (727-8110)
Through Sept. 3: "The Mad Magician" (1954, John Brahm), with Vincent Price, Mary Murphy, and Eva Gabor; and "House on Haunted Hill" (1959, William Castle), with Price, Carol Ohmart, and Richard Long.
Sept. 4: "Strait-Jacket" (1964, William Castle), with Joan Crawford, Diane Baker, and Leif Erickson; and "Shanks" (1974, Castle), with Marcel Marceau.
Sept. 5: "Twilight of the Cockroaches" (1987, Hiroaki Yoshida); and "The Naked Jungle" (1954, Byron Haskin), with Eleanor Parker and Charlton Heston.
Sept. 6: "Giant Gila Monster" (1960, Ray Kellogg), with Don Sullivan and Lisa Simone; "The Killer Shrews" (1960, Kellogg), with James Best, Ingrid Goude, and Ken Curtis; and "Teenagers from Outer Space" (1959, Tom Graeff).
Sept. 7: "Akira" (1989, Katsuhiro Otomo).
Sept. 8: "The Creeping Unknown" ("The Quatermass Xperiment"; 1956, Val Guest), with Brian Donlevy; "Enemy from Space" ("Quatermass II"; 1957, Guest), with Donlevy; and "Five Million Years to Earth" ("Quatermass and the Pit"; 1967, Roy Ward Baker), with James Donald, Barbara Shelley, and Andrew Keir.
Sept. 9-10: "Nosferatu" (1922, F. W. Murnau; a German silent film), with Max Schreck; and "Aelita" (1924, Yakov Protazanov; a Russian silent film).
From Sept 11: "Captain Kronos: Vampire Hunter" (1974, Brian Clemens), with Horst Janson; and "Near Dark" (†).

**Theatre 80 St. Marks,** 80 St. Marks Pl. (254-7400)
Sept. 2: "The Spy Who Came In from the Cold" (1965, Martin Ritt), with Richard Burton, Claire Bloom, and Oskar Werner; and "The Man Who Never Was" (1956, Ronald Neame), with Clifton Webb, Gloria Grahame, and Robert Flemyng.
Sept. 3: "Testament of Orpheus" (1959, Jean Cocteau; in French); "Blood of a Poet" (1930, Cocteau; in French); and "Orpheus" (1949, Cocteau; in French), with Jean Marais, Maria Casarès, and François Périer.
Sept. 4: "Blazing Saddles" (1974, Mel Brooks), with Cleavon Little, Gene Wilder, and Madeline Kahn; and "Silent Movie" (1976, Mel Brooks), with Brooks, Marty Feldman, Dom DeLuise, and Sid Caesar.
Sept. 5: "Kiss Me Deadly" (1955, Robert Aldrich), with Ralph Meeker and Albert Dekker; and "The Big Knife" (†).
Sept. 6-7: "A Streetcar Named Desire" (†); and "The Long, Hot Summer" (1958, Martin Ritt), with Paul Newman, Joanne Woodward, Anthony Franciosa, Orson Welles, Lee Remick, and Angela Lansbury.
Sept. 8: "Animal Crackers" (†); and "Duck Soup" (1933, Leo McCarey), with the Marx Brothers.
Sept. 9: "Night Is My Future" (1947, Ingmar Bergman; in Swedish), with Mai Zetterling; and "The Devil's Wanton" (1949, Bergman; in Swedish), with Doris Svenlund, Birger Malmsten, and Eva Henning.
Sept. 10: "Dr. No" (1963, Terence Young), with Sean Connery (as James Bond), Ursula Andress, and Joseph Wiseman; and "Thunderball" (†).
Sept. 11: "Luna" (1979, Bernardo Bertolu[illegible]), with Jill Clayburgh and Matthew Barry; and "The Conformist" (†).

## FILM LIBRARIES, ETC.

**Museum of Modern Art,** Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9490)—Sept. 2 at 2:30 and Sept. 7 at 5: "Early Spring" (1956, directed by Yasujiro Ozu; in Japanese), with Chika Awashima. . . . ¶ Sept. 2 at 6 and Sept. 5 at 2:30: "Oh, Mr. Porter!" (1937, Marcel Varnel), with Will Hay, Moore Marriott, and Graham Moffatt. . . . ¶ Sept. 3 at 2:30: "Rome Express" (1932, Walter Forde), with Conrad Veidt, Esther Ralston, and Harold Huth. . . . ¶ Sept. 3 at 6: "Number Seventeen" (1932, Alfred Hitchcock), with Leon M. Lion, Anne Grey, and John Stuart. . . . ¶ Sept. 5 at 6 and Sept. 7 at 2: "Blind Chance" (1982, Krzysztof Kieslowski; in Polish). . . . ¶ Sept. 6 at 2:30 and Sept. 8



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## MOVIE HOUSES—Cont'd

at 5: "High and Low" (1963, Akira Kurosawa; in Japanese), with Toshiro Mifune. . . . ¶ Sept. 6 at 6 and Sept. 8 at 2: "Intentions of Murder" (1964, Shohei Imamura; in Japanese). . . . ¶ Sept. 9 at 2:30: "Sullivan's Travels" (see blurb on page 15). . . . ¶ Sept. 6 at 6 and Sept. 10 at 2:30: "No Man of Her Own" (1950, Mitchell Leisen), with Barbara Stanwyck, Jane Cowl, and John Lund. . . . ¶ Sept. 10 at 6: "Matewan" (1987, John Sayles), with Chris Cooper, James Earl Jones, and Will Oldham.

**American Museum of the Moving Image**, 35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria. (1-718 784-0077)—A series of Western films. Sept. 3 at 2: "The Cowboys" (1971, Mark Rydell), with John Wayne, Roscoe Lee Brown, and Bruce Dern. . . . ¶ Sept. 4 at 2: "Bad Company" (1972, Robert Benton), with Jeff Bridges. . . . ¶ Sept. 5 at 2: "Ulzana's Raid" (1972, Robert Aldrich), with Burt Lancaster and Bruce Davison. . . . ¶ Sept. 6 at 2: "High Plains Drifter" (1973, Clint Eastwood), with Eastwood. . . . ¶ Sept. 7 and 10 at 2: "The Last Movie" (1971, Dennis Hopper), with Hopper, Julie Adams, Peter Fonda, and Kris Kristofferson. . . . ¶ Sept. 7 at 4:30 and Sept. 11 at 2: "Kid Blue" (1973, James Frawley), with Dennis Hopper and Warren Oates. . . . ¶ Sept. 8 at 2: "McCabe & Mrs. Miller" (1971, Robert Altman), with Warren Beatty, Julie Christie, René Auberjonois, John Schuck, Keith Carradine, and Shelley Duvall. . . . ¶ Sept. 8 at 4:30: "Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid" (1973, Sam Peckinpah), with James Coburn and Kris Kristofferson.

**Anthology Film Archives**, 32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (505-5181)—Sept. 6 at 8, Sept. 7 at 6, and Sept. 8 at 4: Three programs of films by Georges Méliès. . . . ¶ Sept. 6 at 9:30 and Sept. 8 at 8: Two programs of films by Marie Menken. . . . ¶ Sept. 7 at 4 and Sept. 8 at 9:30: A program of short films by Louis and Auguste Lumière. . . . ¶ Sept. 7 at 8: "Diaries, Notes & Sketches" (1964-68, Jonas Mekas). . . . ¶ Sept. 8 at 6: "Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania" (1971-1972, Jonas Mekas). . . . ¶ Sept. 9 at 7 and 9: "Together Alone" (1991, P. J. Castellaneta). . . . ¶ Sept. 9 at 7:30 and 9:30: "Coal Miner's Granddaughter" (1991, Cecilia Dougherty). . . . ¶ Sept. 10-11 at 7 and 9: Four different programs of short films from the 5th New York Lesbian and Gay Experimental Film Festival.

# IN BRIEF

### SEE ABOVE FOR THEATRE ADDRESSES AND TELEPHONE NUMBERS.
### IF A MOVIE HAS BEEN REVIEWED IN "THE CURRENT CINEMA" DURING THE PAST TWO YEARS, THE DATE OF ITS REVIEW IS GIVEN.

(The following notes are by Pauline Kael, Terrence Rafferty, and Michael Sragow.)

**Animal Crackers** (1930)—The Marx Brothers in their pre-Hollywood period; like "The Cocoanuts" of the year before, it was a Broadway musical comedy, slightly adapted, and filmed in Astoria—and it looks stagy. But the film is too joyous for cavilling. Groucho is the fearless African explorer Captain Spaulding, who deigns to attend a party at Rittenhouse Manor, on Long Island; Margaret Dumont is Mrs. Rittenhouse and Lillian Roth is her daughter Arabella. Arguably the best line: "Signor Ravelli's first selection will be 'Somewhere My Love Lies Sleeping' with a male chrous." Once again, the writers were George S. Kaufman and Morrie Ryskind; this time the songs (the justly celebrated "Hooray for Captain Spaulding" and "Why Am I So Romantic") were by Bert Kalmar and Harry Ruby. Directed by Victor Heerman.—P.K. (Theatre 80 St. Marks; Sept. 8.)

**Barton Fink**—With John Turturro and John Goodman, directed by Joel Coen. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Movieland 8th Street Triplex, Coronet, and Carnegie Hall Cinemas.)

**The Big Knife** (1955)—It's in the same garish genre as "The Bad and the Beautiful." It's paced too fast and pitched too high, immorality is attacked with almost obscene relish, the knife turns into a buzz saw. Maybe because of all these faults of taste, you can't take your eyes off it. Rod Steiger gives a classic performance as a destructive, self-righteous Hollywood magnate; Jack Palance is surprisingly effective as the overwrought John Garfield-type star. With Wendell Corey, Shelley Winters, Everett Sloane, Jean Hagen, Ilka Chase, and Ida Lupino and Wesley Addy as sanctimonious characters who, regrettably, are the authors' mouthpieces. James Poe adapted Clifford Odets' play. Robert Aldrich directed, overdoing everything in sight; he just about turns hysteria into a style.—P.K. (Theatre 80 St. Marks; Sept. 5.)

**Boyz N the Hood**—The writer and director, John Singleton, is a twenty-three-year-old graduate of the U.S.C. film school. This movie, his first, is a classically constructed—and therefore rather predictable—coming-of-age drama about young black men growing up on the mean streets of south-central Los Angeles. The picture conveys a vivid sense of the dangers, both physical and emotional, of day-to-day existence in this ravaged urban environment. Even the quietest domestic scenes are charged with a kind of battle-front tension: there's always the ominous metronomic beat of police helicopters in the background, and sudden sputters of gunfire seem to intrude on every moment of calm or reflection. It's a war zone, and its inhabitants—the people on the front lines—mostly don't have the luxury of planning long-range survival strategies: they're too busy reacting to the immediate, unremitting daily threats. Singleton's evocation of real people's struggles to find some measure of peace and sanity in these grim urban circumstances is heartfelt and often moving, and the movie provides a welcome corrective to the dehumanizing sensationalism of the local-news version of inner-city life. But the young filmmaker's professionalism and precocious self-assurance sometimes work against his best instincts. Singleton's plot is disappointingly conventional; it obeys screenwriting-class rules. The experience he's dealing with here deserves something more than the tidy dramatic structure that he has imposed on it. We get glimpses of what the movie might have been in the complex, magnetic performance of Ice Cube, a rap star (formerly of N.W.A.), who plays a neighborhood gangster type named Doughboy. Also with Cuba Gooding, Jr., Larry Fishburne, Nia Long, Tyra Ferrell, and Angela Bassett.—T.R. (Loews Village Theatre VII, Murray Hill Cinemas, 86th Street East Twin, Chelsea Cinemas, Olympia, and Criterion Center.)

**City Slickers**—This feel-good comedy, directed by Ron Underwood from a script by Lowell Ganz and Babaloo Mandel, is a depressingly efficient piece of Hollywood product. The hero, Mitch Robbins (Billy Crystal), is a thirty-nine-year-old New York family man who's going through a killer midlife crisis. His wife (Patricia Wettig) gets so fed up with his moping that she virtually orders him to take a vacation with his buddies Ed (Bruno Kirby) and Phil (Daniel Stern); Ed, a daredevil, macho type, has arranged for them to spend two weeks on a real cattle drive out West. Mitch's wife looks him in the eye, and says earnestly, "Go and find your smile"—and, ninety minutes later, there it is, a grin as big as all outdoors. His pals pick up the odd nugget of wisdom along the trail, too. The movie alternates predictable tenderfoot gags (sore behinds, stampedes, and the like) with long, ludicrous passages of group-therapy-on-the-range. Jack Palance, as Curly, the trail boss, manages some dry, macabre comic effects, and the animals are good—they're interesting to look at, and they don't make bad jokes. You can't help sympathizing with the cattle; by the time the movie is over, you know what it feels like to be part of the herd. Also with Helen Slater.—T.R. (Reviewed in our issue of 6/17/91.) (Angelika Film Center, Plaza, and Worldwide Cinemas.)

**The Commitments**—Alan Parker's film is a loose, friendly musical comedy about the brief career of an Irish soul band. The Commitments are the brainchild of an energetic young music enthusiast named Jimmy Rabbitte (Robert Arkins), who lives in a poor Dublin neighborhood. He puts together a ten-piece group that learns, eventually, to play precise and spirited versions of soul classics in the Memphis style. The music of the Commitments isn't original, but that doesn't prevent it from being enormously entertaining: the band's hard-won proficiency charms us. Parker concentrates on the day-to-day details of rehearsals and performances; he seems to revel in the complexity of the group's musical, emotional, and sexual interactions, and he does full comic justice to the petty irritations of life in a band. The movie gives us a vivid picture of Dublin's poverty and urban blight, but it's more interested in capturing the rhythm of the characters' wit than in showing us how oppressed they are. What holds the Commitments together is a combination of Jimmy's ingenuity, their common pleasure in making music, and the daily challenge of responding to their fellow band members' provocations with quick, profane humor. The kids' verbal sparring is another kind of music—maybe the true sound of Dublin soul. Until the last half hour, when the direction gets a little pushy, the picture has an offhand, unassuming grace. Most of the Commitments are played by young Dublin musicians who answered a casting-call advertisement. They're a vivacious and spontaneous crew: Andrew Strong, Angeline Ball, Maria Doyle, Glen Hansard, Kenneth McCluskey, Félim Gormley, Dave Finnegan, Dick Massey, and Michael Aherne. The only professional actors among them are Bronagh Gallagher and Johnny Murphy (as the group's guru, a fiftyish trumpet player known as Joey the Lips). Colm Meaney does a very funny turn as Jimmy's Elvis-worshipping dad. The screenplay is by Dick Clement, Ian La Frenais, and Roddy Doyle, from Doyle's novel. The songs are great—chosen, with unusual intelligence, from the repertoires of Otis Redding, Aretha Franklin, Wilson Pickett, and other soul giants.—T.R. (8/26/91) (Beekman, Chelsea Cinemas, Ziegfeld, and 62nd & Broadway.)

**The Conformist** (1970)—Bernardo Bertolucci wrote and directed this extraordinarily rich adaptation of the Alberto Moravia novel about an upper-class follower of Mussolini. It's set principally in 1938. Bertolucci's view isn't so much a reconstruction of the past as an infusion from it; the film cost only $750,000—Bertolucci brought together the décor and architecture surviving from that modernistic period and gave it all unity. Jean-Louis Trintignant, who conveys the mechanisms of thought through tension, the way Bogart did, is the aristocratic Fascist—an intelligent coward who sacrifices everything he cares about because he wants the safety of normality. Stefania Sandrelli is his deliciously corrupt, empty-headed wife, and Dominique Sanda, with her swollen lips and tiger eyes, is the lesbian he would like to run away with. The film succeeds least with its psychosexual approach to the Fascist protagonist, but if the ideas don't touch the imagination, the film's sensuous texture does. It's a triumph of feeling and of style—lyrical, flowing, velvety style, so operatic that you come away with sequences in your head like arias. With Pierre Clémenti as the chauffeur, Gastone Moschin as Manganiello, and Enzo Tarascio as the anti-Fascist professor (who resembles Godard). Cinematography by Vittorio Storaro. In Italian.—P.K. (Theatre 80 St. Marks; Sept. 11.)

**Dead Again**—With Kenneth Branagh, A[illegible]y Garcia, Derek Jacobi, Hanna Schygulla, and Emma Thompson; directed by Branagh. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Loews Village Theatre VII, Loews 34th Street Showplace, Loews New York Twin, U. A. East, Chelsea Cinemas, Loews 84th Street Sixplex, and Loews Astor Plaza.)

**Doc Hollywood**—The cast is amiable, but the movie is routinely ingratiating. Michael J. Fox plays a plastic surgeon en route from Washington, D. C., to Beverly Hills, who crashes his '56 Porsche Speedster in Grady, South Carolina, "the squash capital of the South." There he learns about life beyond liposuction. Grady is a TV-bred baby boomer's fantasy. At times, it's like Mayberry with breasts, peopled with likable eccentrics and down-home beauties—including a smart, sexy gal who plans to stay put (Julie Warner) and a live wire who's aching to get out

(Bridget Fonda). At other times, it's a racially corrected version of the cultured Dixie in PBS's "The Civil War": Fox's ornery medical superior (Barnard Hughes) recites poetry, and the 58th Grady Squash Festival features a special screening of Buster Keaton's "The General." Fonda gets to ply her ticklish erotic rascality, and Woody Harrelson, as an inexplicably smoldering insurance agent, jolts every scene he's in with aberrant comic energy. But there's a jerry-built climax and a protracted post-climax. And the hero's odyssey is too easy. He turns out to be a small-town boy himself; the whole movie is just a case of Fox getting back to where he once belonged. Michael Caton-Jones directed; Peter Seaman, Jeffrey Price, and Daniel Pyne wrote the script, from Laurian Leggett's adaptation of "What? . . . Dead Again?" by Neil Shulman, M.D.—M.S. (Murray Hill Cinemas, Sutton, Chelsea Cinemas, Loews 84th Street Sixplex, and West Side Cinema.)

**The Doctor**—Although it's sure to hook some viewers who want to see the medical establishment get knocked, this is no exposé—it's yet another story of identity crisis in the professional class, a fraternal, if not identical, twin of "Regarding Henry." William Hurt plays the surgical golden boy who develops a case of galloping humanity after he's diagnosed with throat cancer; Christine Lahti and Charlie Korsmo play his neglected wife and son; Elizabeth Perkins is the life-force who inspires him (she's suffering from a Grade IV brain tumor); and, in matched parts, Mandy Patinkin is a callous Jewish doctor (Hurt's longtime partner) and Adam Arkin is a saintly Jewish doctor (who shows Hurt correct values). The director, Randa Haines, and the screenwriter, Robert Caswell, titillate the audience with a barrage of doctors' jokes and then try to prove that the cynical professionalism of hospital staffs is no laughing matter. In effect, the movie goes from comic shtick to problem-drama shtick, and fuses them. Hurt's performance is the type usually described as "accomplished," but what exactly does it accomplish? It's a careful embodiment of a clammed-up individual; not a hint of zest or dirt or soulfulness seeps out. Based on "A Taste of My Own Medicine," by Ed Rosenbaum, M.D.—M.S. (Village East Cinemas, Gramercy, Cinema I, and Loews Paramount.)

**Do the Right Thing** (1989)—The third feature by Spike Lee takes place in the black neighborhood of Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn, on a punishingly hot day; the focus of the action is a pizzeria, Sal's Famous, which is apparently the last white-owned business on the block; and the climax is a riot sparked by a monstrous act of police brutality. At its most basic, Lee's intention is to demonstrate how in a racially polarized society the slow accumulation of small irritations can swell to something huge and ugly and lethal. It's a solid idea for a movie, and initially the picture provides its share of incidental pleasures. It has loads of atmosphere, and superb cinematography by Ernest Dickerson, who gives the images a daring, Hawaiian-shirt glare. And although most of the many characters Lee shows us are types, at least there are a lot of different ones, and their encounters are often funny. But Lee goes wrong by pushing his material to a "powerful" climax, a Scorsese-like explosion of violence: he sacrifices political clarity for the sake of the big statement. He's nimble-witted and passionate, but his movie seems to shout at us rather than speak to us. In addition to writing, producing, and directing, Lee also plays the pivotal role of Mookie, the pizza deliveryman.—T.R. (Embassy.)

**Europa Europa**—This superb film by the Polish director Agnieszka Holland is based on the memoirs of Salomon Perel, a German Jew who spent much of the Second World War passing for Aryan in an élite Hitler Youth academy. The movie dramatizes this almost inconceivable survival story with a surprisingly light touch. It bounds from one jaw-dropping episode to the next with the speed and the unnerving neutrality of a picaresque adventure, and never pauses to judge its ambiguous hero; it's content to let the ironies of his situation collect around him like reflections in dressing-room mirrors. His family's flight from the Nazis begins in 1938, on the eve of his bar mitzvah. Solly (played by a remarkable young actor, Marco Hofschneider) lands first in Lodz, Poland, and then in the Soviet Union, where he becomes

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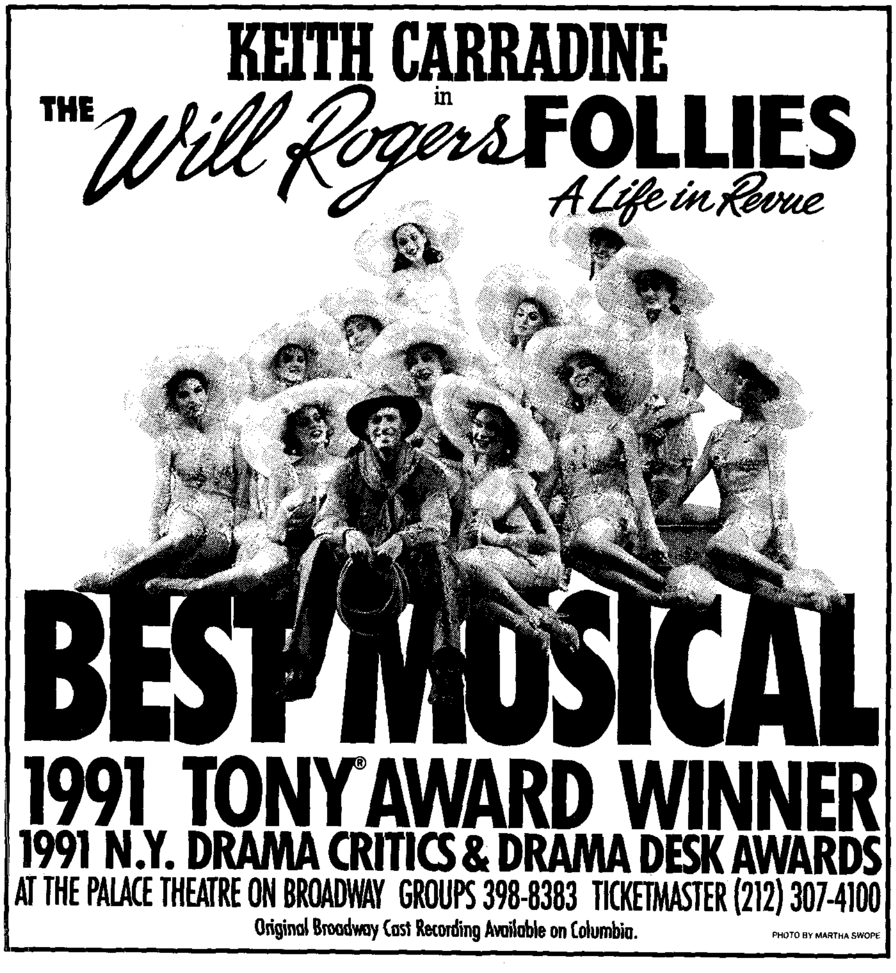

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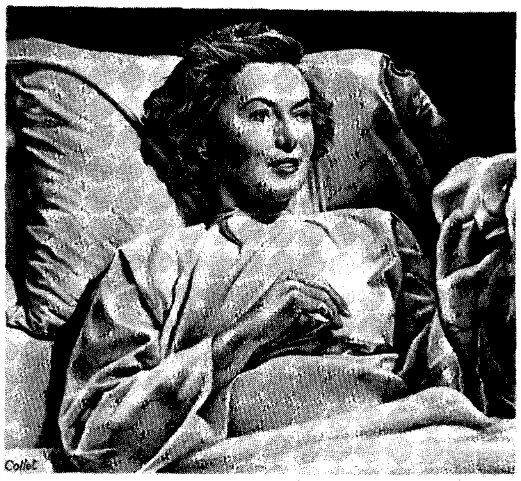
a star pupil in a Communist school. After the Wehrmacht invades Russia and takes him prisoner, he reincarnates himself as an orphaned "pure" German, an Aryan child wandering in the barbaric eastern wilderness; as translator and mascot, he accompanies the German soldiers on their march through Russia. By the time he is initiated into the Hitler Youth, he has already run through several identities, and has proved himself capable of playing his roles with conviction and enthusiasm. We remain, however, constantly aware (as he is) of what his Nazi disguise conceals—his circumcised penis, the irreversible and unambiguous sign of his identity as a Jew. Holland uses this physical evidence of Solly's Jewishness as the fulcrum of the movie's delicately balanced narrative and moral tensions. She shows us the thoroughness of Nazi terror in the pained expression of a teen-age boy who doesn't dare allow himself to be seduced. Also with Julie Delpy, Andre Wilms, Halina Labonarska, and Rene Hofschneider. In German and Russian.—T.R. (7/1/91) (Lincoln Plaza.)

**Ginger and Fred** (1986)—The title of this Fellini movie is alluring, but the picture isn't about those two tapping, twirling icons. It's about two mediocre dancers (played by Giulietta Masina and Marcello Mastroianni)—small-timers, curiosities—who, in the nineteen-forties, entertained Italian vaudeville audiences by imitating the Astaire-Rogers numbers. Now they are being reunited, in Rome, for an appearance on a Christmas TV Special. This situation (which is reminiscent of Neil Simon's "The Sunshine Boys") serves as a pretext for Fellini to vent his disgust at TV. He "flashes" his spoofs of TV programs and commercials as if they were obscene images, and he means them to be obscene. They're images of piggy abundance—oral and infantile. But Fellini has no zest for energizing these skits, or the rest of the material, either. This is a cranky, wobbling movie. Fellini appears to be condemning TV for being a green slime that's absorbing everything, and denouncing it, too, for passing him by. The film treats Masina's character with an element of condescension, and Mastroianni is playing the Maestro's view of himself as an aging, crumbling tower of a man—a drunken bum. With Franco Fabrizi as host for the Special and Frederick Lebedur as the old admiral. The score, by Nicola Piovani, has a lovely finesse; the script is by Fellini, Tonino Guerra, and Tullio Pinelli. In Italian.—P.K. (Biograph Cinema; Sept. 8-9.)

**Hot Shots!**—"Good for a few laughs" may be the motto for the "Airplane!" college of filmmaking, but it applies literally to this sputtering spoof of military movies and commercials. The lampoons go all over the globe, in more ways than one. The director, Jim Abrahams, and his co-writer, Pat Proft (who also co-wrote "The Naked Gun 2½," with David Zucker), stab away at the myth of American and Hollywood know-how without proving their own competence at creating momentum or a solid comic personality. The maverick pilot played by Charlie Sheen isn't a charismatic parody figure. He simply stands in for an entire generation of male action stars who are also just stand-ins. And Abrahams' funny treatment of Second World War clichés doesn't mesh with his gloss on the MTV flyboy epic "Top Gun." His movie becomes part of the same junk-food chain as that glorified video game: the ad might as well read, "You've seen the original, you've bought the soundtrack, you've rented the cassette, now see the takeoff!" Co-starring Valeria Golino, Cary Elwes, Jon Cryer, the underused Bill Irwin and Lloyd Bridges, and Chihuahuas Jake and Elwood.—M.S. (34th St. East, Gotham Cinema, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, Art Greenwich Twin, Chelsea Cinemas, Regency, and Criterion Center.)

**101 Dalmatians** (1961)—One of the few Disney animated features that please adults as much as children, this action comedy has loads of waggish charm. The plot is out of a horror film. As Cruella De Vil prepares ninety-nine young Dalmatians for the kill so she can make dogskin coats, you can't help thinking, "The Silence of the Pups." By telling the story from the perspective of Pongo and Perdita, parents of fifteen dognap victims, the Disney team turns it into a light-fantastic parody: a dog's-eye (or child's-eye) view of storybook Britain. Humans are "pets," and a country-wide canine corps takes over when agencies like Scotland Yard fail. Cruella has been justly celebrated for her Tallulah-from-Hell flair (Betty Lou Gerson contributes an arsenal of Bankhead-like snarls). But Pongo is every bit her match. He's a gallant, resourceful animal with surprising pockets of slyness and gaiety, and the crisp, virile voice of Rod Taylor. Headed by a blustery sheepdog colonel, a Kipling-esque trio of barnyard soldiers aid Pongo and Perdita. The small army of pups form a lovable composite character and a constantly changing sight gag. Trekking through a blizzard-blasted landscape, they're a cross between a canine caterpillar chain and a coal-flecked snowdrift. Bill Peet wrote the smart script, from Dodie Smith's book; Wolfgang Reitherman, Clyde Geronimi, and Hamilton S. Luske directed.—M.S. (Village East Cinemas, Murray Hill Cinemas, and Cinema 3rd Avenue. Matinées only.)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*At MOMA, Barbara Stanwyck in "No Man of Her Own"*

**The Miracle**—A beautiful new film by the Irish writer and director Neil Jordan ("Mona Lisa," "The Company of Wolves"). The setting is the coastal town of Bray, which is a short train ride from Dublin. Two teen-agers, Jimmy (Niall Byrne) and Rose (Lorraine Pilkington), spend most of their days wandering along the seaside promenade and making up stories about the people they run into: taking off from the human material that presents itself to them, the kids trade verbal riffs with the gleeful competitiveness of jamming musicians. One day, they spot a mysterious-looking blond woman (Beverly D'Angelo), and Jimmy becomes obsessed with her. He pursues her, in Bray and in Dublin, with an ardor that's partly sexual and partly something else—a feeling so muddled and inchoate that he can't put a name to it. Jordan turns this simple story into a clear, complete vision of experience: everything we see (and hear) flows into everything else, with an unpredictable rightness. The imagery draws on some pretty outré sources, and the climax—the miracle of the title—is a daring, flamboyant gesture. But Jordan manages to unite everything—the florid imagery, the dark emotional undertones, the flaky comedy, the astonishing physical beauty of the Irish seacoast—into a single, unbroken mood, a smooth arc connecting the past and the present, the familiar and the unforeseen. Also with Donal McCann. The cinematography, by Philippe Rousselot, is extraordinary.—T.R. (7/15/91) (Village East Cinemas. . . . ¶ Cinema 3rd Avenue. Evenings only.)

**The Naked Gun 2½: The Smell of Fear**—Leslie Nielsen plays Frank Drebin, a middle-aged police lieutenant whose lethal weapon is utter obliviousness. This movie—like its predecessors, the 1982 TV series "Police Squad!" and the 1988 film "The Naked Gun"—has the look of cheap, hasty television action drama. It's oblivious of production values, narrative sense, and all the higher, finer aspects of the human spirit—of everything, that is, except the impulse to spray us with jokes and knock us out of our chairs. The director, David Zucker, has a defiantly cheesy style. For him, nothing's ever too trashy or worn out to be used again; what he practices is, in the truest sense, pulp comedy. There's a hint of an environmental theme in the plot of "NG 2½," but Zucker and his co-writer, Pat Proft, never allow it to slow down the picture's relentless barrage of slapstick, movie parodies, outrageous double-entendres, and cracked musical production numbers. And Leslie Nielsen is inspired. He plays Drebin as a straight arrow who's finally letting go, giving in to his repressed impulses: he sings, he dances, he loves, he shoots to kill. Nielsen combines B-movie earnestness, exuberant mugging, and a trouper's slightly desperate cheerfulness: he turns this rather alarming character into a sweet, ebullient lunatic—albeit one who's hell on innocent bystanders. Also with Priscilla Presley, Robert Goulet, George Kennedy, Richard Griffiths, and O. J. Simpson.—T.R. (7/29/91) (Loews 19th Street East 6, Worldwide Cinemas, and Loews Festival.)

**Near Dark** (1987)—The vampires here are a gang of outlaws travelling by van, drifting around the country, hibernating in motels during the sunlight hours. Most of the time they pick off a chance victim, but when they're really bloodthirsty they take over a roadside bar and slaughter everybody in it. This thriller, directed by Kathryn Bigelow, has a nocturnal, erotic atmosphere, shards of wit, and some better performances than are customary in the genre. And it becomes more intense as it goes along. Vampirism is reversible here, so the characters' fates aren't sealed, and this allows for curiosity about what will happen to the melancholy heroine, appealingly played by Jenny Wright. (She bites reluctantly and almost mournfully, yet hungrily.) Bill Paxton, as the most rambunctious of the gang, has a biker's gusto that energizes his scenes. Jenette Goldstein makes an impact, too—she's the mom figure of the pack. The cast includes Lance Henriksen as the dad figure, Joshua Miller as the little brother, Adrian Pasdar as the new inductee, Tim Thomerson, and Marcie Leeds. A painter-turned-filmmaker, Bigelow (who was a graduate student in film at Columbia) shows a talent for the uncanny; the cinematography, by Adam Greenberg, contributes to the exploitation-movie lyricism that draws you into the horror. The script is by Eric Red and Bigelow; music by Tangerine Dream; editing by Howard Smith.—P.K. (Film Forum 2; starting Sept. 11.)

**New Jack City**—A Saturday night not-so-special, with juicy bits and pieces. Mario Van Peebles' primitive but energetic anti-drug melodrama stars Wesley Snipes as a self-made crack king, Ice-T and Judd Nelson as the cops who try to bring him down, and Van Peebles himself as their boss, modestly named Stone. The screenwriters, Thomas Lee Wright and Barry Michael Cooper, portray Snipes' charismatic villain as a brutal ghetto cousin of the eighties white-collar criminals. He believes that a man must "rob to get rich in the Reagan era." He also must extort and murder. In the most shocking sequence, Snipes turns an entire building into a crack apartment house. The narrative is a hash. With its combination of alienation and derring-do, "New Jack City" is like *Melvin* Van Peebles' "Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song" and Brian De Palma's "Scarface" (it contains clips from both) crossed with "Serpico" and earnest TV cops-and-robbers series. When the drug lord's romantic problems come to the fore, you wonder if you missed an episode. As a whole, the mo[illegible] resembles sixties biker movies as well as seventies blaxploitation films: the camera keeps riding the action, and the cast is loose and entertaining.—M.S. (Public Theatrte; starting Sept. 6.)

**The Night of the Shooting Stars** (1982)—In its feeling and completeness, this film by Paolo and Vittorio Taviani may rank close to Jean Renoir's bafflingly beautiful "Grand Illusion," and maybe because it's about the Second World War and Renoir's film was about the First, at times it's like a more deracinated "Grand Illusion." The story is a woman's memories of her adventures as a six-year-old in a Tuscan village and its environs during the summer of 1944, when the American troops were rumored to be only days away, and the Germans who had held the area under occupation were preparing to clear out—preparations that included mining the houses so they could blow them up. Yet this setting is magical, like a Shakespearean forest, and the woman's account has the quality of folklore and legend, and even its most tragic moments can be dizzyingly comic. The full fresco treatment that the directors give to the events of that summer is based on their own wartime experiences as adolescents, and on the accounts of others; it's this teeming, fecund mixture, fermenting in their heads for almost forty years, that produces the film's giddy, hallucinated realism. With Omero Antonutti (who was the father in "Padre Padrone") as the leader of the group of two or three dozen villagers who sneak away in the night to find the Americans. The script is by the Tavianis and the producer, Giuliani G. De Negri, with the collaboration of Tonino Guerra; the score is by Nicola Piovani; the cinematography is by Franco di Giacomo. In Italian.—P.K. (Biograph Cinema; Sept. 8-9.)

**Paris Is Burning**—Jennie Livingston's documentary about gay black and Latino men who compete in drag balls is a beautiful piece of work—lively, intelligent, exploratory. The drag queens we see here seem to be holding up a mirror to the world of the empowered as they see it in movies, TV shows, and magazines. In the ballroom, some present themselves as elegant, glamorous women in designer outfits, and walk with the hip-swinging slouch of runway models, while others adopt more mundane personas: college students (of both sexes); military men; Wall Street businessmen; aristocrats at play, dressed for yachting or riding to hounds. The criteria by which all these turns are judged is verisimilitude—"realness." The material is almost too rich, too suggestive. Everything about the ball culture signifies so blatantly and so promiscuously that the movie induces a kind of semiotic daze. Livingston is smart enough not to reduce her subjects to the sum of their possible meanings, perhaps because she realizes that the way the drag performers manipulate image and fetishes and the iconography of popular culture is for many of them a sophisticated form of humor. The most self-aware of the gay men in this picture revel in the ironies of their social and sexual identities, and Livingston makes us appreciate the comic grace and the strange wisdom of that approach. Like all the best documentary filmmakers, she does her subjects the honor of allowing them to retain some of their mystery. Edited by Jonathan Oppenheim.—T.R. (3/25/91) (Film Forum, and Lincoln Plaza.)

**Regarding Henry**—Harrison Ford, hot-shot lawyer, takes bullets in the head and shoulder from a corner-market thief. He loses his memory and physical control, regains the ability to talk and walk, and discovers that his long-spurned wife (Annette Bening) and thirteen-year-old daughter (Mikki Allen) are all that's important to him. The writer, Jeffrey Abrams, combines feeble finger-pointing satire of the success-obsessed upper class with life lessons that are hard to swallow. They won't go down past the artificially induced lumps in the throat. The director, Mike Nichols, in his second attempt to wring tears and laughs from *haute bourgeois* marital dramedy, falls flatter than ever—he goes from "Heartburn" to filmmaking arrhythmia. With the exception of an eager beagle named Buddy, this is the worst-performed, limpest, least credible Nichols movie yet. While it purports to attack yuppie values, the hero fulfills the latest yuppie fantasy: chucking everything and starting from square one. A nice trick for those who can afford it.—M.S. (Loews 19th Street East 6, Loews 34th Street Showplace, Gemini, and Worldwide Cinemas.)

**A Streetcar Named Desire** (1951)—Vivien Leigh gives one of those rare performances that can truly be said to evoke pity and terror. As Blanche DuBois, she looks and acts like a destroyed Dresden shepherdess. No one since the early Lillian Gish and the almost unknown, plaintive Nadia Sibirskaya of "Menilmontant" (1926) has had this quality of hopeless, feminine frailty; Shakespeare must have had a woman like this in mind when he conceived Ophelia. Blanche's plea "I don't want realism. . .I want magic!" is central to "Streetcar." When Marlon Brando, as the realist Stanley Kowalski, cuts through her pretensions and responds to her flirting with a direct sexual assault, the system of illusions that holds her together breaks down, and he is revealed as a man without compassion—both infant and brute. Elia Kazan's direction is often stagy, the sets and the arrangement of actors are frequently too transparently "worked out," but who cares when you're looking at two of the greatest performances ever put on film and listening to some of the finest dialogue ever written by an American? When Vivien Leigh says "The Tarantula Arms!" or "It's Della Robbia blue," you know how good Tennessee Williams can be. He adapted his play himself, with additional adaptation work by Oscar Saul; the music is by Alex North; the cinematography is by Harry Stradling. Academy Awards: Best Actress (Leigh), Supporting Actress (Kim Hunter), Supporting Actor (Karl Malden), Art Direction and Set Direction (Richard Day, G. J. Hopkins). But at the time theatre managers complained that more customers left than came in. (It took a while for this movie to reach its audience.)—P.K. (Theatre 80 St. Marks; Sept. 6-7.)

**Terminator 2: Judgment Day**—The killer cyborg who was played by Arnold Schwarzenegger in the original "Terminator" (1984) has returned—only this time he's the hero. The first film, which was written and directed by James Cameron, is one of the genre-movie classics of the eighties: a lean, witty science-fiction movie without great pretensions to significance. The sequel, also written (with William Wisher) and directed by Cameron, is far less satisfying. The picture is full of spectacular action sequences and dazzling special effects, but the narrative doesn't have the snap of the original's: it's lumbering and monotonous, and it carries a heavy-handed anti-nuke message. The old, Schwarzenegger-model Terminator (the T-800) has been superseded by a more advanced model, the T-1000 (Robert Patrick), who is sleeker and more versatile. T-800, who represented the ultimate in destructive technology in the first film, seems almost human here: compared to T-1000, he's a vulnerable guy (or guyoid). The whole movie is based on the insane conceit that Arnold Schwarzenegger is the *underdog*. That's a stretch. Also with Linda Hamilton, Edward Furlong, and Joe Morton. Effects by Stan Winston and many, many others.—T.R. (7/29/91) (Movieland 8th Street Triplex, Loews 19th Street East 6, Gemini, Loews 84th Street Sixplex, and Criterion Center.)

**Thunderball** (1965)—Sean Connery as James Bond. The setting is Caribbean; the enemy is Adolfo Celi, the mastermind of SPECTRE, who stoops to using sharks. Terrence Young directed. Not bad, but not quite top-grade Bond. A little too much underwater war-ballet. With Claudine Auger and Luciana Paluzzi, and, of course, Bernard Lee and Lois Maxwell. The script was written by Richard Maibaum and John Hopkins.—P.K. (Theatre 80 St. Marks; Sept. 10.)

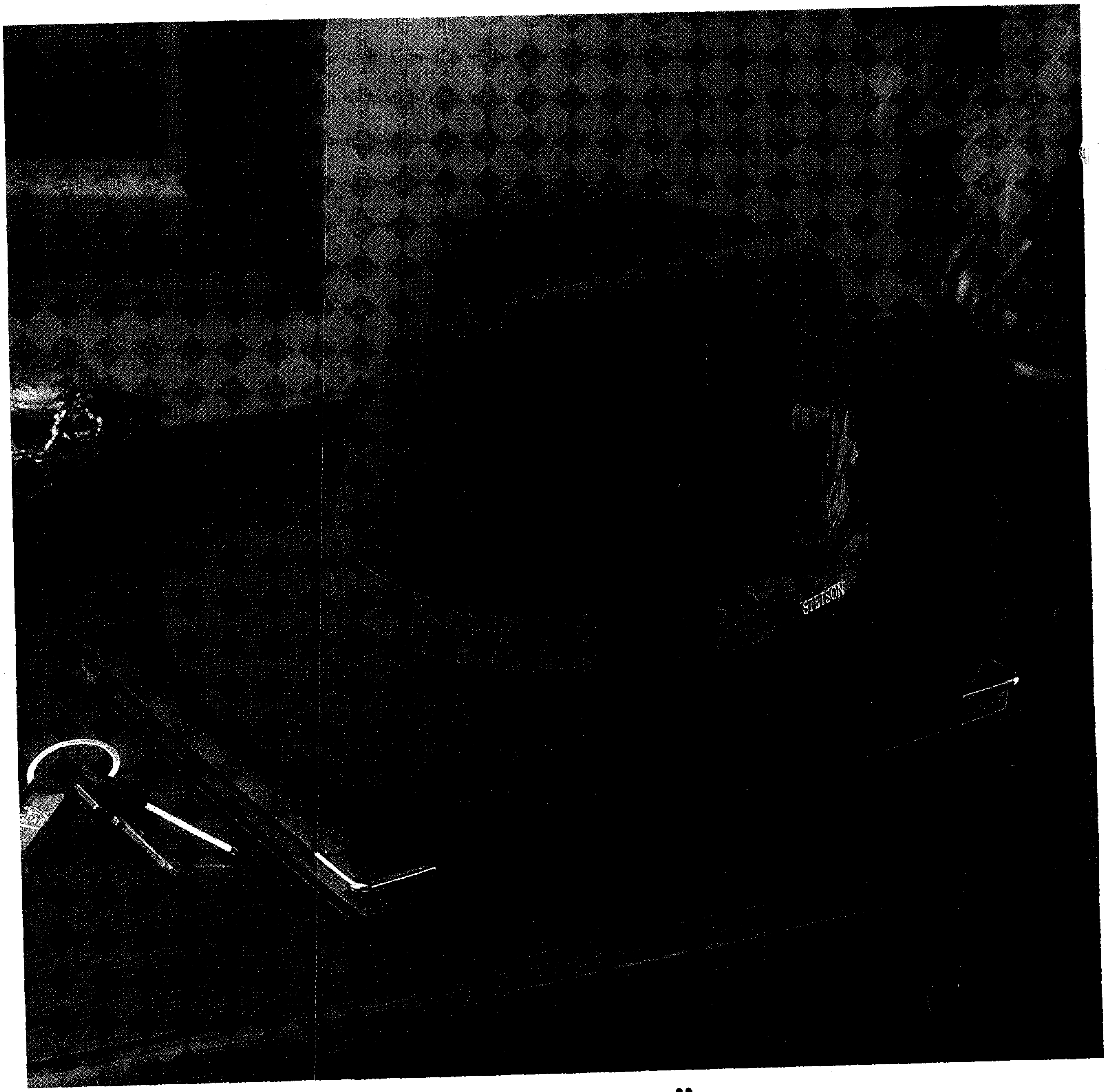
**Truly, Madly, Deeply**—A lovely, original comedy about a young woman, named Nina (Juliet Stevenson), who is obsessed with the memory of her dead lover. The writer and director, Anthony Minghella, establishes an unusual, delicately varied mood, and the film moves gracefully from a realistic mode into a fantastic one. One night, Nina's lover, Jamie (Alan Rickman), reappears in her flat, and his presence seems perfectly natural to us: he has emerged from a setting that is already charged with the heroine's feelings for him. Once he's back, she has to confront, in the most concrete way, what it would really mean to live the rest of her life with a dead guy as her significant other: the movie is less a ghost story than a weird kind of domestic comedy. Minghella draws us into a fresh and startlingly humane vision of modern urban life; the details of the heroine's way of living always seem to point beyond themselves, and there's an emotional unity to everything we see. Minghella writes dialogue that sounds casual but somehow takes us straight to the heart of his work's larger concerns, and he directs the actors beautifully. Rickman is unexpectedly romantic here, and very funny besides. And Stevenson gives a radiant performance: she doesn't have a false moment, or a boring one, in the whole picture. Cinematography by Remi Adefarasin.—T.R. (5/6/91) (Quad Cinema.)

*At Film Forum 2,*
*Andrew Keir and James Donald in*
*"Five Million Years to Earth"*

**Trust**—This independent film by the young writer and director Hal Hartley ("The Unbelievable Truth") takes place entirely in a white, middle-class neighborhood in a forlorn-looking Long Island town. His Long Island is a bleak, featureless, neither-here-nor-there milieu. It's a place where anything can happen and almost nothing does—where parents and children, living together in tight quarters, torment and negotiate with each other just to create some drama for themselves. In Hartley's world, moody ex-cons and earnest high-school girls are the only really interesting people around. This picture tells the story of the strange relationship—part romance, part tutorial, part vaudeville act—between a pair of suburban losers, Matthew (Martin Donovan) and Maria (Adrienne Shelly). He's a thirtyish, chain-smoking depressive who lives with his widowed father (John MacKay). She's an adolescent bimbo who, when she announces to her family and her boyfriend that she's pregnant, discovers that this persona isn't going to be much use to her; she decides that she has to change her life. The story moves by surprising leaps, with the rhythm of the main characters' erratic, uncertain progress toward an awareness of possibilities beyond their limited, cramped experience. Hartley is alert to the absurdities of their situation; he keeps the film's tone dry, and makes the threatening, pervasive nothingness of the milieu grotesquely funny. His style is a risky blend of formal abstraction and dramatic realism, and it demands resourceful actors. Donovan has a gangling, dishevelled charm, and his bummed-out line readings are superbly timed; and Shelly brings off Maria's transformation from teen-age temptress to serious young woman with extraordinary ease. Under Hartley's direction, they seem to be inventing an acting style for a brand-new genre: the existentialist comedy of manners. Also with Merritt Nelson, Edie Falco, and Gary Sauer.—T.R. (8/12/91) (Angelika Film Center.)

**Truth or Dare**—Madonna was at her best on "Saturday Night Live," when she played herself for laughs as a pop temptress who puts out for her fans. But in this maddeningly prolonged, self-important, semi-documentary backstage look at her Blond Ambition tour, she plays not just for laughs but for shocks, tears, leers, and, most of all, for adoration. Her way of being truthful and daring is to allow the young director, Alek Keshishian, to depict her as a twenty-four-hour diva who mothers her backup performers and as a scantily clad Statue of Liberty standing up for free expression. The bits of her stage show (shot in 35-mm. color; the rest is in 16-mm. black-and-white) seem ludicrous when she describes them as part of "an emotional journey." The movie has been so over-reported that the celebrity bits with Warren Beatty, Kevin Costner, and Sandra Bernhard, and the friction among members of Madonna's biological and stage families, come off as the retold story. There's no charge left to seeing Madonna do what you've already read about. The movie is all calculation, no revelation—unless you count the calculation itself as a revelation.—M.S. (Quad Cinema.)

# THE ONE TIME YOU CAN LET SUCCESS GO TO YOUR HEAD.



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THE NEW YORKER

# THE TALK OF THE TOWN

## *Notes and Comment*

A FRIEND who recently returned from the Soviet Union writes:

It was "the power of the people" that did in the plot against Mikhail Gorbachev—so President Bush said, and the majority of his fellow-commentators agreed. The rallies of support for Boris Yeltsin as he defied the wondrously named State Committee on the State of Emergency showed that a once-submissive populace had seen the glories of democracy and free enterprise, and had risen up against a last small band of Stalinists, thus clearing the way for "rapid reform" and its benefits. As I followed all this on television and in the papers, I wondered what country I could have been visiting just a few weeks before the coup, when most of the people I encountered seemed quite ambivalent about the merits of capitalism and democratic politics as they have been practiced in the years of Gorbachev's reign. My wife and I were part of a writers' exchange, and we spent our time in the company of men and women who, by and large, loathed the Communist Party, treasured their newfound freedoms, and yet viewed the current crop of Russian politicians, left and right, with disdain—as opportunists and windbags who were forever hurling invective at each other while their country went to hell. Many an outspoken democrat, I was told, had been an equally staunch Communist just a few years before. One writer pointed out that Boris Yeltsin, as first secretary of the Sverdlovsk branch of the Party in the early eighties, had done nothing to prevent the persecution of rock musicians, one of whom was given a lengthy prison sentence for the crime of making electronic synthesizers.

Another well-trodden career path, I learned, was the one leading from Communist apparatchik to prosperous businessman. Judging from most of the American news coverage, you would think that *perestroika* has been all rhetoric and no action. Well, on one level—the level of the vast state enterprises charged with satisfying the basic needs and wants of the Soviet people—this may be an accurate assessment. In Moscow and Leningrad, and also in smaller cities, however, the effects of the economic reforms are there for all to see, in "commercial stores" offering clothing and appliances from abroad (often brought in by Soviet travellers confident of a handsome profit); in pint-size outdoor markets selling remarkably good-looking fresh fruits and vegetables; and in sidewalk kiosks well stocked with books, cigarettes, audiotapes and videotapes, and tourist items. The new retail outlets present a highly attractive contrast to the state-run stores in every respect but one: the prices. Those are far out of the reach of all but the tiny percentage of the people who are themselves involved in the new economic activity.

In Leningrad, we found a coöperative, or private, restaurant where two people could have a meal of excellent mushroom soup, shashlik, salad, ice cream with berries, and champagne for a sum of rubles equivalent to less than five dollars (though amounting to maybe half the monthly salary of a typical Russian). Pleased with our discovery, we invited a fervently anti-Communist writer to dine with us, but he politely declined. Though he didn't know our particular restaurant, he explained, such establishments were mostly run and patronized by "gangsters." When I asked him if he could think of a single example of a coöperative business selling useful goods at prices that average citizens could afford, he said he could not.

Another writer bemoaned the absence of any code of laws, or ethics, to guide the new business activity. Conflict of interest, he said, is scarcely even a known concept; thus, state agencies and officials are free to launch business enterprises on the side, diverting real estate, equipment, and raw materials from public purposes to private ones. He added that an ordinary person going into business didn't stand much of a chance, between the bureaucrats, with their advantages, and the gangsters, with theirs.

I heard plenty of anxious talk about a possible wave of reaction. These fears, however, were not just fears of a back-room coup instigated by leaders of the K.G.B. and the military but fears of a popular backlash born of hostility toward entrepreneurs and intellectuals, and dangerously coupled with feelings of nationalism, anti-Semitism, and economic desperation. Sergei Selyanov, a film director we visited in Leningrad, recited a popular parable about the Russian capacity for envy. God tells a peasant he can have as much as he wants of any one thing, with a small proviso: his next-door neighbor gets twice as much. The peasant, after thinking long and hard, eagerly announces that he has decided to have one of his eyes gouged out.

It has become an article of faith in Washington and in the American media that chronic Soviet sloth is the main impediment to economic progress—that if the country would only throw itself into the reform process with abandon all sorts of good things would happen. Being fairly well infected with this view, I was surprised to hear Sergei Selyanov speak mournfully about a very different Russian tendency (a tendency of the Russian intellectual and political élite, at any rate): to embrace foreign ideas—he mentioned Christianity, Communism, and unbridled capitalism—with brutal suddenness. A screenwriter from Moscow posed a riddle. "What is the main obstacle in the path of *perestroika*?" he asked. "The people," he answered, gravely, and he went on to note that the members of the Communist Party and the employees of the various Old Guard ministries, with their spouses, children, and other dependents, added up to perhaps a third of the Soviet population—a tremendous number of citizens who, though most of them could not care less about Marx or Lenin, were justifiably fearful of economic reform.

Until the events of the last two weeks, the unravelling of Soviet tyranny was a difficult story for Americans to get a handle on, lacking, as it did, such basic elements as an excited citizenry, a cathartic confrontation between old and new, and (especially in the last year or so) a popular leader—popular in his own land, I mean. Now all these ingredients have seemingly been supplied, and the week that brought democracy to the Soviet Union has taken its place (along with the earlier kindred developments in Poland, Czechoslovakia, and East Germany) as another chapter in the saga of the onward march of democracy. President Bush hailed the defeat of the coup as proof that this process, once begun, is "irreversible." But Soviet history is full of evidence suggesting otherwise, one large case in point being the Bolshevik Revolution itself, which followed on a period of years that had seen democracy make fitful strides forward. I suspect that the recent crisis, too, might easily have gone the other way. Those rallies of support for Yeltsin and the Russian Parliament, impressive and stirring as they were, consisted of perhaps fifty thousand people in Moscow and a few thousand in Leningrad. The overwhelming majority of Russians and other Soviet citizens were safely offscreen, preparing themselves, I assume, to live with any result, and, in many cases, hoping that the State Committee on the State of Emergency would be an improvement on Mikhail Gorbachev.

Although the demonstrators certainly deserve much of the credit for the coup's collapse, so do the plotters themselves: a circle of frightened men who, apart from their much dissected problems of "incompetence," appear to have been—like the timid liberals ambushed by the Bolsheviks in October of 1917—wanting in the necessary cold-bloodedness. They were, as Susan Eisenhower wrote the other day in the Washington *Post*, "not, by any means, the worst the Soviet Union has to offer." They were prepared to take power if they could have it on the cheap, it seems, but not if it entailed anything like, say, Tiananmen Square. And even so, according to no less an authority than Boris Yeltsin, they might have succeeded if a small team of K.G.B. anti-terrorism specialists had been willing to carry out the key mission of capturing Yeltsin and seizing the Russian Parliament building. In this sense, democracy's triumph was, like Bolshevism's, the product of a delicate and chancy sequence of events which made it possible for a minority movement to gain not only power but (in the eyes of its champions the world over) an air of inevitability. I am afraid that, having molded the story of the Soviet Union's convulsions into this satisfying shape, Americans will be tempted to file it away and turn their attention to some new part of the world while Soviet history goes on unfolding unpredictably.

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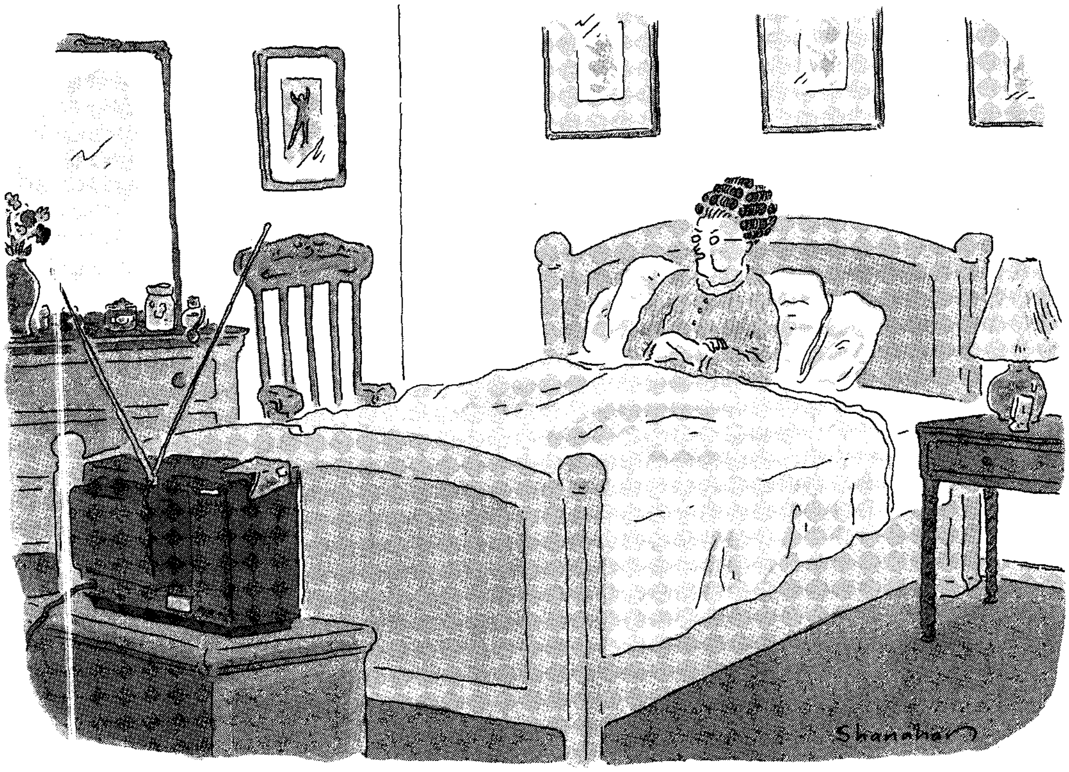
A YOUNG woman we know writes:

Our family friend Volodya, who has been my mother's pen pal for more than twenty years, and whom my parents have been able to visit whenever they've gone to the Soviet Union, made his first trip to the United States this summer. He arrived here on only a few days' notice, bringing several big suitcases, and he told us with pride that his friends in Odessa had scraped together ten thousand rubles for his ticket, which had come through unexpectedly. Also, he said, he had brought spending money with him, so that he could live in the United States for a month and not impose too much on his American friends: one hundred and fifty dollars.

Volodya deposited all but one of the big suitcases at a friend's house—a friend who, like Volodya, had left the Soviet Union on a moment's notice, a year ago. The friend had stayed on, and Volodya was bringing him his effects. The remaining suitcase contained a couple of changes of clothes and some presents for my family. It pained us to think of the trouble he must have taken to get the presents. One was a little framed square of maroon cloth that had been painstakingly embroidered with a spray of pink and white flowers; he had pasted paper over the back of the frame, because the embroidery was so valuable, he said, that if the inspectors had seen its price he would not have been allowed to take it out of the country. The other presents included some painted boxes and spoons and a stiff plastic doll with orange braids and a colorful folk costume. We remembered seeing news footage of Soviet women desperately pushing their way into an ill-supplied Moscow toy store, and thought of all the small girls over there who must have wished they could have that doll. (The youngest member of our family is an eighteen-year-old boy.) We wanted to load Volodya down with gifts to take home to his wife, Katya, and their two children, but his pride would not let him accept more than a few. Volodya did not like to go into American stores. "It is too much," he would say, looking away.

Americans perhaps do not understand the extent to which the current crisis in the Soviet Union is an economic one, and the political unrest a direct result of empty stores and the fear of the coming winter. Reports out of Moscow last week were that food had miraculously appeared on Moscow shelves as soon as the "Committee of Eight" took power. Apparently, the Committee had stockpiled food—no one knew how much—to sabotage Gorbachev's government. A sickening manipulation: I remember Natalya, another Russian friend of ours, who was in America a couple of years ago, and how she stared at the rows upon rows of vegetables being spritzed by magic misters in the neighborhood I.G.A., then looked down at the floor, overcome.



*"You won't find Miss Miriam Hirschman an easy nut to crack, Mr. Leno."*

• •

We watched CNN on the day of the coup, searching for signs of hope. It was also the day that Volodya was scheduled to return to the Soviet Union, and his mood was grim. Friends of his in Brighton Beach had called him at three o'clock that morning. "They said I must not fly now—it is too dangerous," he told us. "But for me there is no decision to fly or not to fly. Because of my family. They told me that now, because of the coup, I can be a political refugee. I said I have no choice but to return." Just before he left to board the plane, he said, "*Eto uzhas, kashmar*" ("It's horrible a nightmare"). At that moment, we wondered if we would ever see him again.

Now, a week later, we are amazed at all that has taken place in the Soviet Union, but what we feel even more strongly is simple relief that Volodya and the other people we know in the U.S.S.R. are not in immediate danger. We called Volodya yesterday to make sure he had arrived home safely, and we also called several other friends we were worried about. They all had news to tell, but their stories, coming from different cities, didn't really help us form a cohesive idea of the state of affairs.

Volodya, in Odessa, did not seem as exhilarated as the people we have been seeing on television. He spoke first about his journey home. "Anything could have happened while I was on the plane," he said. "A military junta can exert tremendous power. I was not sure if I might be arrested when I got off in Moscow."

"For what?" we asked.

"It does not matter," he said.

But things went better than he had feared. "I reached Odessa on the twenty-fourth," he said. "Katya had found out about the coup a day after I did. When she heard the news over the radio that morning, she began to cry. Then she called her friends. All friends began to call each other. They got together at each other's houses and listened to the foreign radio reports. Since then, in my city, the democratic-minded people have been meeting. We have been talking about the things that must be done now. First, we must consolidate power in a democratic government. Second, we must decide the fates of the people who headed the coup. You must know, it was not just a few people who planned the putsch; it was a great many. These people want to hinder our reform. They must be brought to trial. Third, we must consider what will become of our country—which republics are to stay, which are to leave the territory, whether it will remain a union or not."

We told Volodya that we were more worried than ever about the economic crisis in his country. We said we had heard that the people were angry at Gorbachev for failing to provide food, and that their anger had helped strengthen the coup leadership, and we asked Volodya if he thought that the government could improve the situation now. "There is bread in Odessa, but, in truth, there isn't much," he said. "We have a saying here: 'If there is nothing at *all* to be bought for money, there is still something to be bought for *all* your money.' There are ways to find food. But there is even less on the shelves than last year, and the winter will be harsh. If we don't get help, people will not survive this winter. There is no time for us to plan, and the harvests have been bad. These things have not changed this week."

Next, we called the city of Lugansk, whose name until a few months ago had been Voroshilovgrad—after a Stalinist military leader—to try to find out if Alim was all right. Alim, a professor of mechanical engineering, had spent some months in our town in Oklahoma in 1987, teaching at the local university. He accompanied our family to rodeos, square dances, and various other attractions, but his favorite event was something he called "movie *marafon*," when we would rent three or four videos on a weekend night. On his second week here, noticing that he had brought only two changes of clothes for a stay of four months, we got him a lavender-and-pale-green gingham short-sleeved shirt. Alim wore that shirt loyally nearly every day, despite our teasing. He called my mother a *burzhuaznaya marksistka* ("little bourgeois Marxistette"). When he left for the Soviet Union, he took with him, among a great many other things, a state-of-the-art computer, to do his research on. It was by far his favorite acquisition, and when it was stolen from him last year the shock and misery of the loss made him so ill that he was in the hospital for more than a month.

One reason we wanted to call Alim is that he has been a member of the Communist Party, and we were afraid that some sort of vigilante retribution might be springing up against Communists, no matter how innocuous they were. We couldn't reach him—he had moved last year, and in the Soviet Union it can take two or three years for a phone to be installed—so we called Natalya, the young woman who had visited us two years ago, and whose family is close to Alim's, for news. Natalya was thrilled to hear us on the phone. We interrupted her exuberant exclamations to ask tensely, "How is everything in Lugansk?"

"*Vsyo normalno*," Natalya answered calmly—a hilariously typical Russian understatement, meaning "Fine, fine."

"But how is Alim?" we asked, and we explained that we had been afraid for him.

"Oh, he's great," Natalya said. "After all, this is the Ukraine! All is peaceful here. In Moscow, Leningrad, things are happening, but this is a smaller city. We're all very happy."

Finally, we put a call in to Moscow, to our old friend Lara. Lara is active in the reform party Demrossiya, and we suspected that she might have played some role in the recent events. When we last saw Lara and her husband, Igor, four years ago, they had just adopted a son, Ilya. Gorbachev's *glasnost* had exposed appalling conditions in Soviet orphanages—a crisis that the people had known nothing about in the many years of "bad news is no news" governments—and Lara and Igor, like a lot of other couples, were moved to action. My parents went to Ilya's twelfth-birthday party that year, and Lara had prepared a feast: a turkey she had found somewhere, cucumber salad, potato salad, beet salad, cheese, caviar, bliny, and, finally, cake—Leningrad jam torte—and wine. Ilya earnestly recited poetry by Lermontov, to generous applause, and Lara sang. My mother had brought them a boxful of gifts, notably a lilac-colored slicker and umbrella for Lara. Lara had wanted a Newfoundland pup, but we couldn't manage that.

When we called, Igor answered, and told us that Lara was out. "All of us are joyful," he said, and he went on to tell us that Lara had been in the "White House"—the Russian Parliament building—during the entire period of the coup. "She was there three days and nights, supporting Yeltsin," he said. "It was exciting, but it was dangerous, and she wished it would end. We are lucky it ended so well. Yeltsin is a talented, smart man. He will find a way. Without the Communist Party ideals that people have had to conform to, they can find a way—Yeltsin and people like Yakovlev, Shatalin, Shevardnadze. It was bad before the coup, and it is not better now. It can't be, at first. From nothing you get nothing. But we are sure it will get better."

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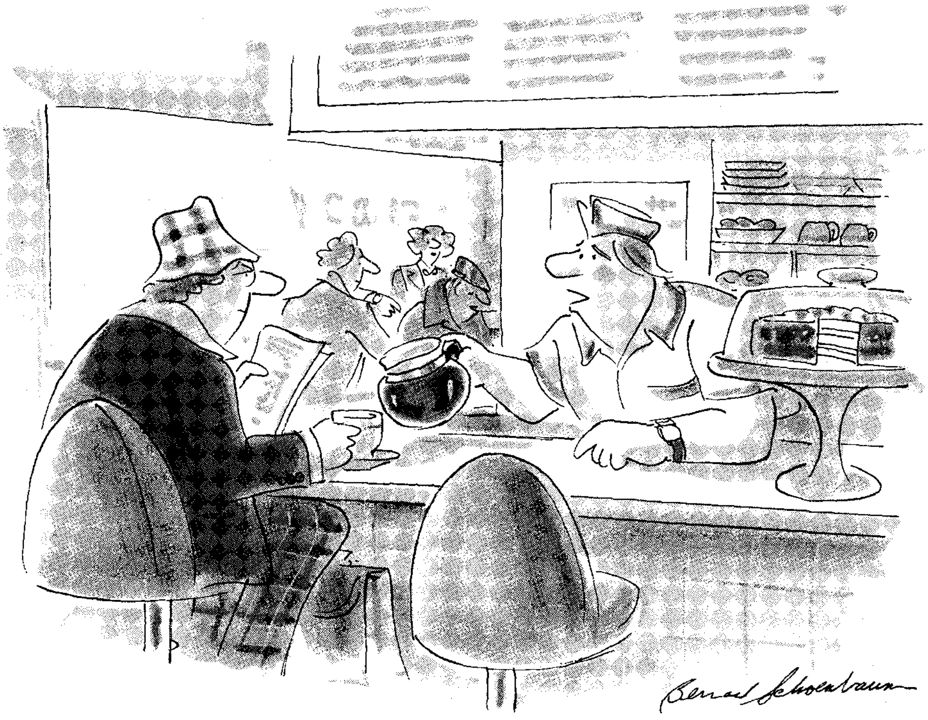
AND an art lover we know writes: Of all the strange and stirring images that filled the television screen last week, a brief and easy-to-overlook sequence is the one that remains most vivid in my mind. It happened, I believe, on Thursday afternoon, during the first attempts by the Muscovites to haul down the colossal statue of the Secret Policeman Feliks Dzerzhinsky from its pedestal outside the K.G.B. headquarters. A team of men had slipped a rope—a noose, really—around the statue's neck, and were trying to topple the enormous figure by sheer muscle power. I was struck first by the continuing, improbable iconic force of heroic statuary in an unheroic age. The revolution, or rout, or whatever history will choose to call it, was only hours old, and this change in civic décor might seem like the last thing anyone's mind would turn to; there were, after all, living and active Secret Policemen still running around loose. But what these Russians went for was the statue—they went for that most ancient and primitive image of power, a huge stone replica of a big shot.

Watching the Russians struggle to bring Dzerzhinsky down, I thought about a Russian friend, a wry and intelligent émigré artist who paints ironic pastiches of Soviet heroic pictures, and who has lived for a while in America. On his arrival here, he saw New York in a way that no New

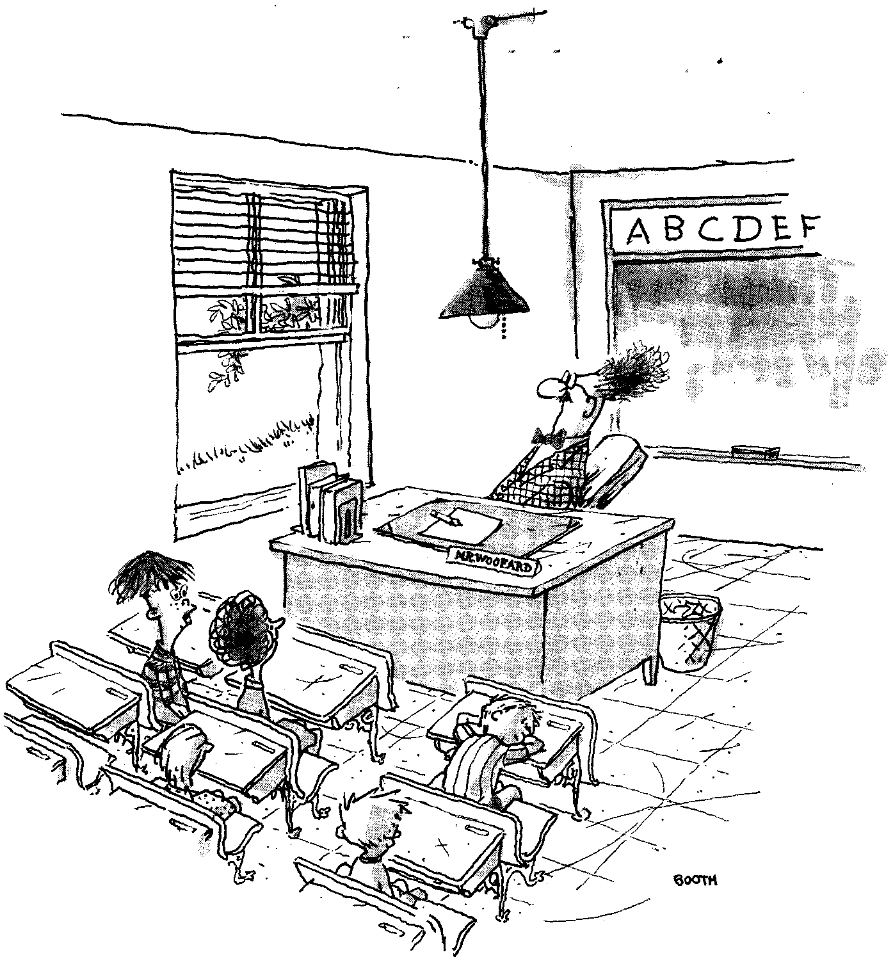


*"No one stops to smell the coffee anymore."*

Yorker has ever seen it—as an alarming forest of old heroic statuary, the stone-and-bronze-big-shot capital of the world. He used to press his friends to explain the significance of statues whose very existence, though we had passed by them hundreds of times, we had never really noticed. What was Daniel Webster looking so complacent about, and why did the motto "Liberty and Union, Now and Forever, One and Inseparable" appear on his base? Why was Benjamin Franklin praised as both "Philosopher" and "Printer"? ("Is it a kind of insurance? Not much of a philosopher but a terrific printer?") Who was this woman leading General Sherman down Fifth Avenue? What point was made by a figure of Shakespeare in tights, holding a quill pen, in the place in the Park where everyone roller-skated? What was symbolized by the way the Statue of Liberty turned her colossal rear toward New Jersey? In a way, of course, my friend was on to something: New York, when you really look at it, is burdened with so much attitudinizing statuary that you might think the island would sink under its weight. But it is the statuary itself that has sunk, for most of us—into a place beyond indifference. We are free to ignore it. Because heroic rhetoric, whether in stone or on paper, no longer has any hold on us, we have become blind to it. Perhaps a self-deprecating realism, a realism alloyed with irony, is the only style that works in a democracy; all our heroic efforts, from Washington upright in his little boat to Sherman riding out of the Park, have come to look comical. There is no insistence holding them up. The only colossal heroic monument that still grips the American imagination is Mt. Rushmore: realism gone nuts, so crazily grandiose that it has an inevitable edge of Pop—Teddy Roosevelt's gold-rimmed spectacles perfectly rendered in tons of carved stone. None of our pointing and marching and speechmaking statues affect us at all; even our Lincoln, who was, after all, a great war leader, is sitting down, thinking things over.

I was considering all this as I watched the Russians' attempt to knock Dzerzhinsky off his pedestal. The engineer who led the team was wearing a sleeveless striped singlet—a tank top, we would call it—and there was something old-fashioned and impressively stringy about his musculature. His glistening biceps had a taut strength that could be produced only in a pre-steroid, pre-Nautilus culture; he had none of the bouncy, overblown appearance of American strong men, whose muscles look as though they were filled with air, or whipped foam. As he planted his feet and tugged on the rope, signalling to his team to join him, I realized that this was a scene—the powerful biceps, the largely bare torsos spread out in a frieze of heroic diagonals—that I had seen many times before. Then I realized where: in the most bathetic, idealizing stretches of official Soviet art. It was a Stalin-era painting, a factory mural come to life! The line of engineers pulled, and pulled again, until CNN cut away to go elsewhere on that marvellous day—to the Supreme Soviet, I think. (I gather that the team eventually had to call in a crane to finish the job.)

"The thing you must understand about the Soviet Union is that it is all made up out of words, clichés, imaginary images," my artist friend once said. "There is no proletariat in Russia, Lenin says—it's a country of peasants. Fine, we destroy the peasantry in order to build a country for an imaginary proletariat. So all the suffering had to follow, in order to make a real country like the words and imaginary pictures." I thought of his words as I watched the heroic, determined workers hauling down the statue of their oppressor. It was as if the favorite fictions of the Communist terror, the idealized creatures spawned by a murderous taste for kitsch, had suddenly come alive, only to turn on their creators. Here the heroic workers were, finally appearing in the flesh—the gallant Soviet people, taking their destiny into their own hands, striving together as one toward a noble goal. Who could have foreseen, when this imagery made its first appearance in the world's art, after the Revolution, that it would take almost a century, and all the tragedies of Soviet rule, for the heroic style to find at last a subject worthy of it?

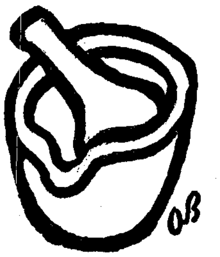


*"You will like Mr. Woofard. He has an attention-deficit disorder."*

• •

# THE WAY PEOPLE RUN

OFF the road, at least a hundred yards into the yellow scrub, Barry thinks he sees an animal, maybe an antelope, nuzzling the arid brush. He's surprised that it has wandered so far out into the open alone. About a mile ahead he sees the town, or what's left of it—a few blanched hackberry skeletons above a small gathering of houses centered on a two-story brick block. Even from this distance, he can tell that the wooden cornices and pediments of this building, the Commerce Building, are rotting. He has been seeing buildings like these and towns like this one for days; the only way he has of knowing that there are any people left is the sizzling rays of neon beer signs from one or two windows in an otherwise shuttered façade. He glances at his speedometer, and then back at the antelope, but what he first saw as an animal in the brush has broken apart, exploded limb by limb into children, six or seven of them suddenly scattering from their clustered spot. They are all different sizes, and as they run one of the big ones tugs along the littlest, a girl three or four years old, not much smaller than his younger daughter, if the distance, and the shafts of morning light through rain heads, and Barry's tired eyes can be trusted.



The café in town is still called the Virginian. Barry walks into the darkness, not sure he should trust the floor. The place smells of cigarettes and beer—not such a bad combination if left to age on its own, but the air is heavy with air freshener. Lilac, maybe it is, or Mountain Meadow. Someone is keeping a business going in here, perhaps because the county road crew stops three times a week, or because the motor-vehicle department keeps a branch open every Tuesday. The tables around the edges of the room are dull black squares rimmed with the semicircles of Windsor chairs. The lamplight is bloodied by red shades at the tables and the bar, but in the center of the room, dominating the territory encompassed by its brilliant processed fluorescence, there is a circular pie cabinet. It is steel and glass, and looks so new that Barry wonders if it is for sale. On the third of six carrousel shelves there is an apple pie, scarred by the removal of a single triangle, revolving in solitary repetition.

Barry assume that the Virginian survives partly on the whims of strangers, but the waitress greets him with a surprised look anyway. He looks for a name tag, or a hint that she might be a relative of some sort. She's about his age, forties, sharp-jawed, and very thin, so thin in her tight bluejeans that she looks almost sexless. She shows him to a table and sets up the silverware in front of him. He sees the pie revolving, watches it several times, and then moves to face the wall. When the waitress comes back with his menu she stares hard enough at his emptied place to force him to explain.

"That pie thing," Barry says. "It's sort of distracting." It's possible that she will find this funny.

The waitress looks at him neutrally, which seems almost a favor. She's not going to knock the establishment; it's clear she's got the only job in town.

"Why is this place called the Virginian?" he asks, looking up from his menu. He has always wondered if the café was named after the book.

She shrugs. "Can't say. Is that where you're from?"

He shakes his head. He hopes she won't ask him "Where, then?" because the true answer is "New York." He hopes she won't ask "So what line are you in?" because these days he's not in any line at all, just sort of looking for work.

"Tourists don't stop in here much," she offers. She hands him this thought.

"Well, no. But . . ."

But what? Coming out West hadn't made a whole lot of sense from the beginning. Barry started this trip with interviews in Los Angeles—fund management, trading, stockbroking, anything with money—even though no one suggested there were any jobs there. He had a briefcase full of recommendations, résumés that came flooding out of copiers and laser printers by the ream in the last days of his firm on Wall Street. At first he called home every night to report. At each stop in California he kept hearing of the boom in Washington—Boeing and Microsoft—and he became part of a wave of suppliants heading north, pilgrims in business suits trying not to recognize each other. He began to want anything that wasn't his: someone's job, someone's car, someone's family. He hit bottom one night in a Seattle hotel that was shabbier than he ought to have risked, considering his mood. He cancelled his last interview and headed back over the Cascades toward home, but in the desert he began to lose his way. He was not entirely sure how many days he had been gone. The hundred-dollar bills that he had watched closely and had broken with anxiety suddenly seemed endless, sufficient forever. An obscure elation began to take the place of schedule and plan. And then, as if planted in his mind like a signpost, came the image of this town, and he turned south for it even as his wife, Polly, wailed on the telephone, as she demanded to know what this detour could possibly do to resolve their plight.

The waitress loses interest during this pause and backs off; she's not going to hazard any piece of herself with him, and there's no reason for her to. "What can I get you?" she asks.

Barry looks at his watch and tries to recall the last three or four times he has eaten, decides it's time for a full midday meal, and orders a strip steak. "Our mashed potatoes are real," says the menu. It has begun to seem almost miraculous that he can stop in these ruined Western towns and find food; it's been days since he's seen cattle, or fields of corn, or vegetable gardens; he doesn't even see delivery trucks on the road. He's been asking waitresses "Do you still have any bacon?" or "What have you got?" as if menus were just memories of the times before a civil war out there cut off supplies. He feels the same way about gas; he's begun to think that way about women.

Barry hears the voices of two men behind him—he saw them under their feed-store caps at the bar when he walked in—and suddenly he regrets turning his back to the room. Each time he overhears a conversation he feels he has made a connection; in the same way, it reassures him to read notices for upcoming county fairs and church events. The waitress is going to think he's crazy, he knows, but he moves to a third side of the table.

"Maybe I should put it here and

wait for you to catch up to it," she says when she returns, holding his plate above the fourth place. She gives him a smile somewhere between exasperation and interest.

"No. I'm settled now," says Barry. He says this straight, unthinkingly, as part of this conversation, but the statement taken in his own slender context is ridiculous, so ridiculous that he finishes it with a kind of bleating laugh on the "now."

A little off, the waitress seems to decide; he's O.K. but just a little off. She puts down his plate and does not wait to ask him how everything is. He thinks it might be funny to ask her for fresh-ground pepper.

The food is quite good, and he relaxes as he eats. The café's rustling tin ceiling is high above him. Above that ceiling, on the second floor, there were once rooms to let, and in one of those rooms his mother spent a week or two just after the war. Barry can imagine the sounds from other rooms, lovemaking and the beribboned serenade of a Bakelite Motorola. The country was flooding then, filling with expectation, and she had gone to the plains to find her father, who had so long ago, lost heart. The story of their meeting and the final hurt it had caused her had become over the years, for Barry and his sisters, the text for a sort of catechism: What is the nature of man? How does sin have power over us? What is meant by betrayal? Barry pictures his mother, her clothes neatly placed in the dresser, her pearls and her aspirin arranged on a stained white table furrowed with cigarette burns.

The waitress is sitting behind the cash register, reading a fashion magazine in the light of the pie cabinet. He beckons to her for another beer. She knows it's an Oly, and he feels recognized through it, and when she brings it she lingers for a second or two. The men at the bar have left.

"When I was coming in I thought I saw children out on the plain."

"I expect you did," she says. "Probably dropping cherry bombs down gopher holes."

"Isn't there a school here?" he asks, thinking of Polly's checklist for evaluating a town: good schools, health care, Episcopal or Presbyterian church, pretty streets, Victorian houses, a Toyota dealership.

*"This really gets you empathizing with those pickers."*

"In Rylla. But the bus has been broke for a couple of days." She picks up his plate and asks, "You want a piece of pie?"

Barry asks her for the check instead. He's ready to find out if she had known his grandfather, but the bartender gives her a call, and she leaves him with no apology. Back on the street he blinks in the sun; the clouds have passed, and now there's no color at all to the light, just illumination, just the searing pressure of day on these powdery buildings. He opens a road map on the hood of his car and then stares over it. There is a white church building with a yard bounded by rusty sheep fencing; the church had once been repainted up to about five feet high all around, and it looks as if it's sinking. Beside the church is a brown house trailer with two bicycles in front, and then a low green ranch with flowers in the yard, and finally an old gas station with an enigmatic hand-painted sign, running like bunting across the windows and door, saying "Welcome to Eleven-Mile Rodeo." The old man had been happy here; that was his chief offense, the irreparable rebuke carried home with his daughter, and the principal evidence of his madness.

"You lost?"

Barry looks up and sees the waitress blinking at him. He thinks for a moment that she is making a joke. "Which way to Broadway?" he asks.

"You ain't there," she says, but she doesn't laugh. Place, her place, isn't funny to her.

He thinks of the biggest city around and tells her that's where he's going.

"I go up there to the dentist," she says.

He folds up his map and he sees her noticing the pile of maps, maybe a hundred of them, which are spilled out onto the passenger seat of his car. This is how it has been lately: catching a glimpse of himself through other eyes. He can't help what they perceive, but he has been careful to shave regularly.

"You know," Barry says, "I've been wanting to ask you. I had some relatives who lived here once."

"Is that so?" She's at least somewhat interested in this unexpected fact, but not enough to ask who, as Barry thought she certainly would.

"Actually, it was my grandfather. Gordon Fox." Barry does not want to admit to her that he does not know when or how the old man died. Barry's mother must have killed her father off in a hundred different speculations, all of them deserved, asked for: drunken staggerings into danger, truculent exposures to the rage of others.

"You're kidding," the waitress says. She whistles. "Old Gordon!"

Barry looks at her carefully to gauge the reaction; claiming kinship with this maligned man could yield unpredictable results.

"Well, I'll be damned," she says, affectionately. She's smiling, at last, and it is quite a nice smile; it fills out her thin face and makes her softer. "He was a funny old prairie dog. He sort of collected cars. You ought to see his place." She gives him quick directions; out here, all directions are quick, even if the distances are long.

He shrugs as if this whole matter were actually not why he came, as if he had business to get on with, and she walks away. He watches her disappear around the church toward the edge of town. He gets in his car and backs out between a dusty Ford pickup and a Subaru; he thinks for a moment that they aren't real vehicles, just junkers without engines that have been left there by the owner of the Virginian to make the place seem popular. He gets back to the main road, and then turns in the direction she told him, back the way he came. He makes a few notations for his journal on the dashboard notepad. These days the journal is nothing but weather; he had recently kept pace with a front, going seventy to remain in the wind and black light, for hundreds of miles. It had left him breathless and exhilarated, as if he had been sailing in a gale.

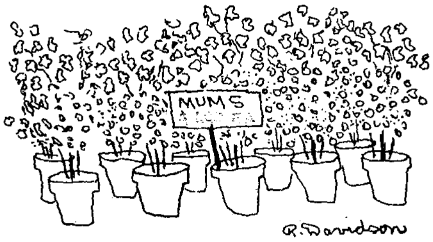
BACK on the prairie the children are one again; Barry imagines the pattern of their clusters and star-shaped explosions across the flats as fireworks. He keeps glancing over at them, and suddenly one of them breaks off and seems to be dancing madly around—a kind of Indian game, maybe. He looks again, and this time it seems that what is happening is that the child is waving at him, that they are all waving at him now. He stops the car and peers over; they are yelling at him. He gets out and begins walking toward them: the soil and the dry fuzz of undergrowth are brittle; his footsteps crunch like broken glass. A little way out he recognizes that he has underestimated the distance. It gets hot, and he slips off his shetland sweater.

When Barry begins to close on the children they turn back away from him, all looking at something at their feet. Now that he is drawing within several yards he realizes that it is a child on the ground. The boy has both his hands pressed white against his left eye socket. There is a little blood on his cheek and forehead and even some coming through his fingers. When Barry sees this he leaps forward. "What happened? What happened?" he says. "Is he all right?"

There are mumbles, but no one answers, not even the biggest, who must be at least sixteen. Instead, they just stare down at the damaged creature curled at their feet. There's a white dusting of soil on his hair and clothes. Barry kneels and says to the boy, "What's hurt? Are you O.K.?"

"My eye," the boy says, scared but not crying. The little girl, the one Barry noticed from the car, is whimpering, but the rest are silent.

"Jesus," says Barry. "Let me see." He reaches out and takes hold of one of the skinny wrists. The boy fights him, and Barry isn't sure what he's doing is right, because maybe the boy is really holding the eye in his head like this; maybe, all things considered, keeping pressure on it is best for the moment.



"What happened?" Barry says one more time, this time directing the question at the oldest.

"Firecracker must of lifted a rock or something. Didn't see it hit."

Barry looks at the firecrackers on the ground, and they seem big enough to be dynamite; they aren't what he would have called cherry bombs.

"Has someone gone to get help?" No one says anything; they are helpless and hopeless. Barry lets go of the boy's wrist, gently pressing his hand to tell him that he has changed his mind, that he doesn't want to see the wound, that it will be best to keep the pressure on. Barry steadies himself on his knees and then picks the boy up in his arms. The load is lighter than he expected, but they're a long way out; his car seems very distant. "Go ahead and tell someone to get a doctor," he shouts angrily at the others. They leave in a pack and head toward the town.

Barry is alone with the injured child. "What's your name?" he asks, trying not to sound winded.

The boy snuffles. Barry has to stop for a moment to take the weight off his arms by crouching over his knees. "You're hurting me," says the boy.

The boy smells musty, almost sour, nothing like the limpid fragrance of

## LEFT OPEN

The shutters are rusted open on the north
kitchen window ivy has grown over
the fastenings the casements are hooked open
in the stone frame high above the river
looking out across the tops of plum trees
tangled on their steep slope branches furred
with green moss gray lichens the plums falling
through them and beyond them the ancient
walnut trees standing each alone on its
own shadow in the plowed red field full
of amber September light after so
long unattended dead boughs still hold
places of old seasons high out of the leaves
under which in the still day the first walnuts
from this last summer are starting to fall
beyond the bare limbs the river looks
motionless like the far clouds that were not
there before and will not be there again

—W. S. Merwin

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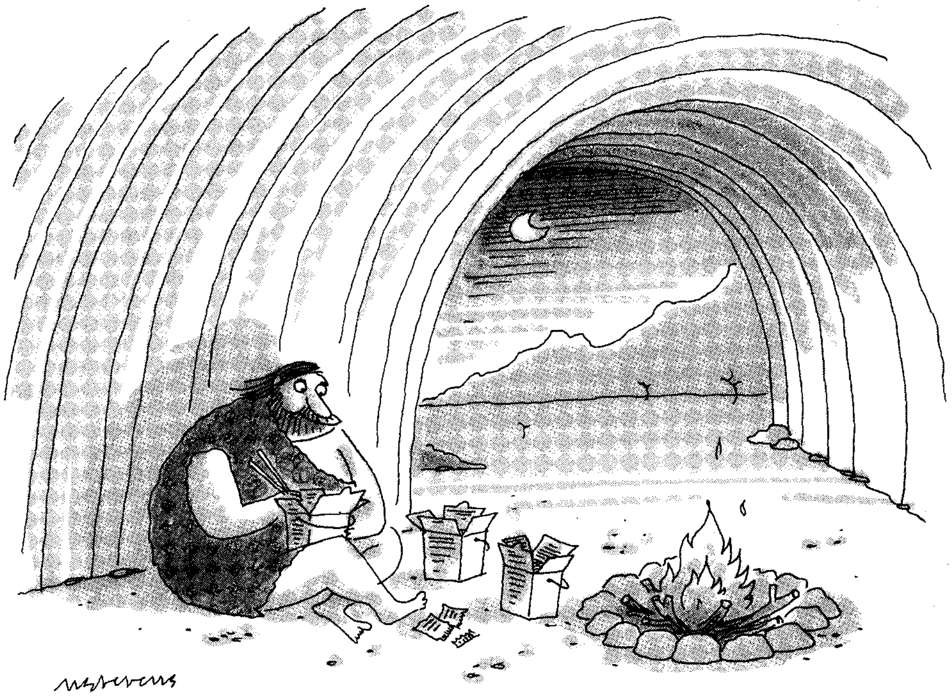

SZECHUAN MAN

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Barry's girls. The child's hair is coarse and spiky, and his twin cowlicks rub raw on Barry's bare arm; the boy's mouth is open, and Barry can see a gray spot of decay on one of the child's crooked teeth. The boy is becoming almost repellent to him, with these unexpressed needs and sullenly accepted favors, as if what the others knew was that this child deserved this missile in his eye, that it was his fault. He wishes the boy would cry or whimper or call out; this wounded silence, as if life and sight did not matter, is perhaps the worst of it.

"Just a little way to go now," says Barry. He's hoping that by the time he gets back to the road someone from the town will come; he doesn't want to get blood on Polly's Camry, though that's not going to keep him from doing the right thing. But no one is there, so he bats away the pile of maps on the passenger seat and lays the boy there. He goes out into the grasses and tries to rub some of the hardening blood off his hands.

Barry looks out for a car coming the other way, but there is nothing on the road; he's driving carefully to keep the boy from dropping his head onto the door upholstery. He has begun to fear that the boy and his dripping eye have been ceded to him for good, no take-backs. But there is, finally, some activity in town: a woman comes streaming out of the green ranch as he rounds the corner, and another woman and a younger man are climbing into a truck, a cherry-red Ford pickup with chrome pipes and reflective windows. The truck is so immaculate that Barry wonders how it got here; it's like an ocean liner on a lake. Barry expects to see the waitress; for some reason he has assumed all along that she will be the first person he greets, that the boy might even be hers.

"Wendall," yells the woman in the truck. She's a sight for this town—almost punk, with lots of makeup and a black leather jacket.

The boy still doesn't cry. What's wrong with him? Barry thinks.

The woman pulls the car door open and helps the boy out. "Can you see out of it, honey?"

"I dunno," the child says.

This single answer from the boy changes the woman's tone. "You know to stand clear," she says harshly, giving him a shake. She's treating him now as if he were a careless construction worker. "Get in the truck, and we'll take you to the doctor."

"No," the boy wails finally. It's the doctor and his waiting room, the smell of pain, maybe, and the glint of needles that set him off. Thank God, thinks Barry, the kid's human. In a few moments they are off, with not a word to Barry. He thinks suddenly—it comes with the visual force of hallucination—that this town is someone's miniature, exposed from above. He looks into the sky and half expects to see an enormous moon-eyed face blotting out the sun.

He's weaving on the sidewalk when this vision passes, and he looks up in surprise to see the little girl standing in front of him, her overalls straps loose on her tiny arms. She's dirt-streaked and is holding a filthy pink blanket with tattered strings of satin binding, but her hair is perfect under two purple barrettes.

"The boy's going to be all right," Barry calls out. "Wendall is going to be fine." He doesn't know why he says this, except that whenever something frightening or bad happens around Gay and Pattie, he tells them it will be all right. He tells them this even as he sinks into despair. Four children killed by stray bullets in a single night, his girls hear on the radio, and Dad says, "It's all right. They're in Heaven."

The girl asks, "Are you in the Army?"

"No," Barry says, not unfamiliar with the abruptness of a four-year-old's conversation.

"Will you play with me for these many minutes?" The girl holds up a sticky palm with all five digits spread.

"How many is that?" Barry asks encouragingly.

"Eight."

A voice comes from across the street just as Barry is ready to smile. "Winona! Don't talk to that man. Come here."

Barry figures the woman is just a little paranoid, and tries not to take it personally; he's a stranger, even if he did just save the life or eye or something of one of this town's sons. "That's right," he says to the girl. "Don't talk to strangers."

"Winona!"

The girl hesitates just long enough to exert a measure of independence. Barry gives a wave over toward the green ranch house: he thinks it's obvious that his wave means that he is a parent, too, that of course she shouldn't talk to him. But the mother takes his wave for a signal that she must act very quickly, and she runs over to swoop up the girl as if rescuing her from the path of a flood. It seems an overorchestrated gesture to Barry. The mother and girl reach the far side of the street, and the woman turns to defy him straight on, large breasts pushed out like musculature. When she's satisfied that Barry has been warned away sufficiently, she pulls the little girl back into the house. Barry sees then that what he took for flowers in her yard is actually litter: waxed cardboard from frozen-vegetable packs, tufts of white tissue, the orange spiral from a box of Tide.

Barry stands there flushed with anger. He cannot imagine how he could be treated as dangerous to small children. Everyone says he's great with kids. He cannot deny that he's a little uninvolved with his own daughters' daily experiences—Polly is a superb mother, really quite remarkable—but he's always figured he'll weigh in strongly when they're teen-agers or young adults. He's getting more and more indignant as he climbs back into his car: he's *from* this town, for God's sake. Sort of. He heads into the prairie. He thinks back to the directions the waitress gave him to his grandfather's spread—go west and go left. He likes the sound of it; he relaxes his anger and makes himself laugh heartily at the thought of these directions becoming some sort of credo for his grandfather, something for his family crest.

Barry's mother's campaign to eradicate her father's memory had been so meticulous and so persistent that there was virtually nothing about his flight that Barry did not know. It began in 1930 with an empty place at the head of the dinner table in Hartford, a setting of china and silver removed by the maid halfway through soup. Lobster bisque, if Barry recalled correctly. He had always been quite fond of his grandmother, a gutsy lady, and had suspected that she was happier to have her husband gone. But for years, dutifully, he had taken his mother's side in this matter, and even now, a pilgrim to the man's final place of rest, Barry can't imagine him being called affectionately "a funny old prairie dog."

He comes to a gravel road, about a mile beyond the point where he had found the children, and takes a left. The wheel tracks are deep as wagon trails, and the grass and brush bend under the car. He drives slowly, up over one rise and down into a deep basin. He seems not to be getting anywhere, for all this motion; the land just keeps rising and falling endlessly.

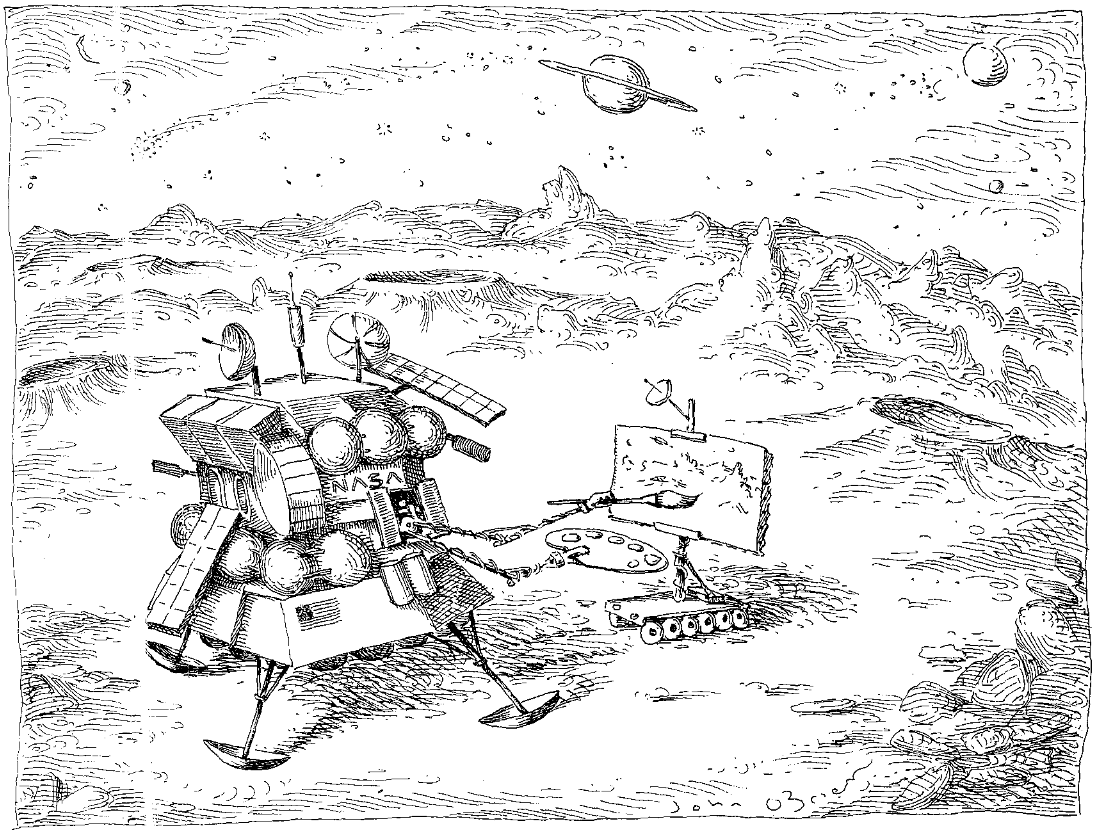
He drives on, and is finally aware of a different quality in the light behind the next rise, strands of luminescence. He reaches the crest and is immediately dazzled by a thousand shards of sun. Then, as his eyes adjust, he sees the source of all this confused display. He understands what the waitress meant when she said the old man collected cars. There are hundreds of them following the contours of this bowl, automobiles and vehicles of other sorts, things on wheels of every possible type. The sun finds the untarnished surfaces on all of them—chrome bumpers, headlamps and rear-view mirrors, still-lustrous hoods and metallic-flaked fenders. The place is spotless and beautiful, as beautiful as anything he has seen on his trip through unrelieved decay and decline. Barry is stunned and uplifted by this dreadful vision. It could be nothing but a junk yard, but the man was clearly up to something, and whether or not he had thought of it this way, he had left behind a monument.

Barry gets out of his car and sits, watching the sun mark an hour or two on the face of this immense obsession. He tries hard, with as much concentration as he has put into anything in the past few months, to figure out what it means. He has not felt so refreshed in many days, has not sensed so many options since he was a teen-ager. There are invitations on the tip of each blade of grass, enticements everywhere.

After a while the rush passes. If there was a sign for him in this, he has not found it, or has not divined its meaning. He hasn't exactly decided what to do next, so he thinks he will return to the town. No doubt there will be someone who wants to thank him for bringing in the child. Perhaps the waitress will be on duty, and he can report back that he has visited Old Gordon's place.

PART LEGEND
KONG, YOU SHOULD TRY THE EAST VILLAGE. IT'S O.K. TO BE DIFFERENT THERE!
W. Bressler
PART DREAM

THERE is no one in the Virginian. Barry grabs a newspaper—it's a few days old—and feels bold enough to go over to his table against the back wall and crack open the storm shutter. A shaft of white light cuts out a wedge of the greasy surface. He unfolds his paper and reads about the high-school sports, and then the social news. At one point a man comes in and walks straight to the bar to pour himself a draught beer with all the familiarity of someone getting water at his own kitchen sink; he stands for a moment, gives Barry a canine stare over the rim of his glass, finishes, and then slaps a handful of change on the bar before leaving. The bartender returns an hour or so later, sees the money, and drops it, coin by coin, into the separate bins of his cash register. It doesn't sound to Barry like much of a gross receipt for a long afternoon, and, in fact, the bartender glares at Barry, as if he damn well could have contributed something himself.



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Barry goes back to his paper, and in a few more minutes the door opens and the waitress comes in. He is surprised by the strong nod of recognition he gets, and is flattered when she walks quickly to his table. She's wearing a name tag now, pinned to her gray sweatshirt—something more formal for supper, perhaps. Her name is May. "You brought Wendall Peters in. That was you."

Barry had forgotten, for these few moments, about the boy, and the modest surprise he shows is genuine. "Oh, that! Yes, I guess I did. Quite a thing."

"I can't believe it." She's very upset.

"How is he?" asks Barry.

"You don't know?"

"What?" he asks. How could he know anything? He could have been two hundred miles away by now.

"He's going to lose the eye. They're taking it out right now up to Good Shepherd." She turns to blow her nose.

Barry believes this; the boy was too still and didn't cry. Their pediatrician always made a joke about that: "The louder they cry . . ." He thinks of the boy's almost rancid odor. The feeling of the spiky hair against his arm comes back, and with it Barry's recognition that he had been *hoping* for something dramatic out of all this, something more than a few stitches in the boy's eyebrow. "It didn't seem that bad," Barry says, defending himself against his thoughts.

"I told them it was dangerous," says May.

Barry reflects that she had not sounded alarmed or nervous at lunch when she described to him what the children were doing. "Of course you did. One of my daughters is a hell-raiser," he adds, trying to remember whether he had told her before that he was a parent. He's been doing a good bit of lying out here—things like pretending he served in Vietnam, during Tet or in the Delta, or saying that he grew up in Arizona—harmless lies, just to ease his way among strangers.

May smiles, finally. "My boy, Everett, is so cautious he scares himself when he sneezes. He's six," she adds.

Wendall, Everett, Winona. What's with the names in this town? he wonders. "So he wasn't there?"

She seems slightly insulted by this deduction. "Well, sure he was there." She wrings a red dishtowel that she has been holding the whole time. "It gives me shivers." She produces a real shiver, a trembling in her shoulders, and when it is done she asks, "Do you want a beer, an Olympia?"

Barry nods, suddenly feeling utterly at home. He has never had a regular eating place, or a regular bar, and has never felt like a patron of any establishment, except perhaps for the paper stand at the mouth of his subway stop. But in this one day he has started to act as if he owned this table, and the people who have been drifting into the bar seem to expect to see him sitting there. He begins to feel a permanence, as if the accidents of the day could not have occurred to a mere passerby. He likes May. Besides, he has been watching her thin-hipped body and is very turned on by her. He has never been unfaithful to Polly, but this could be different—physical and free. His saliva becomes electric at the hard-core images in his mind.

May brings him a beer and then recommends he order the pork chops. "Sure," he says.

Suddenly, the door of the Virginian bursts open, and Barry recognizes the man who had served himself at the bar earlier. He wavers in the doorway and then appears to remind himself to shout out hysterically, "They saved it! They think they saved the eye!"

There is a moment of reduced conversational hum. The man is obviously Wendall's father, quite a bit older than the wife who had claimed the boy earlier and driven off with a younger man. "That's good, Frank," says one male voice, but it is followed by a few snickers. It turns out that the medical report is the product of a drunk's extravagant, self-serving imagination. Frank weaves slightly but holds his place, as if he still expected to be mobbed at the door and carried aloft to the bar for a celebration. At last, May takes the man's hand and leads him over. The bartender shares a look with May, and then pours half a draught beer.

Barry himself is drinking more tonight than he has for weeks, months; he had lost the taste for it just about the time he hit the road. May brings his supper, and then checks back with him in the course of the evening, bringing him beers, giving him the quick line on the other customers, most of them men. There's not much else for her to do. One of the drunks yells at May to get her "skinny ass over here," and he makes a grab for her when she goes by. Barry knows he must accept the fact that she could not possibly have any interest in him. However this woman lives her life, it won't be him she's sleeping with tonight. He is beginning to crash, falling back on nothing but the foul breath of his night's drinking. He thinks about unrolling his sleeping bag and starts to look forward with dread to the morning's heavy dew.

"Where are you staying?" asks May. It's now just about closing time, and he's one of the last people left in the Virginian. The man who grabbed for her has gone. "Going to Rylla or something?"

Barry says, "Sure." Maybe that's it, a motel in Rylla.

"Well, you know," she says.

Barry reads May's hooded, apologetic eyes and slightly set lips, and is stunned to realize that all his unspoken prayers have been answered. She's going to ask him to stay—if not with her, then at least at her place. And she does.

"I've got a spare bedroom."

He accepts. She goes about her cleanup duties, and she makes no attempt at all to hide him; there is nothing furtive here, nothing to apologize for, as if everyone in the room would wish her well in finding a little unexpected companionship.

## YOUTH

Your unhappy and silly youth.
Your arrival from the provinces in the city.
Misted-over windowpanes of streetcars,
Restless misery of the crowd.
Your dread when you entered a place too expensive.
But everything was too expensive. Too high.
Those people must have noticed your crude manners,
Your outmoded clothes, and your awkwardness.

There were none who would stand by you and say,

You are a handsome boy,
You are strong and healthy,
Your misfortunes are imaginary.

You would not have envied a tenor in an overcoat of camel hair
Had you guessed his fear and known how he would die.

She, the red-haired, because of whom you suffer tortures,
So beautiful she seems to you, is a doll in fire.
You don't understand what she screams with her lips of a clown.

The shapes of hats, the cut of robes, faces in the mirrors,
You will remember all that unclearly, as something from long ago,
Or as what remains from a dream.

The house you approach trembling,
The apartment that dazzles you—
Look, on this spot the cranes clear the rubble.

In your turn you will have, possess, secure,
Able to be proud at last, when there is no reason.

Your wishes will be fulfilled, you will gape then
At the essence of time, woven of smoke and mist,

An iridescent fabric of lives that last one day,
Which rises and falls like an unchanging sea.

Books you have read will be of use no more.
You searched for an answer but lived without answer.

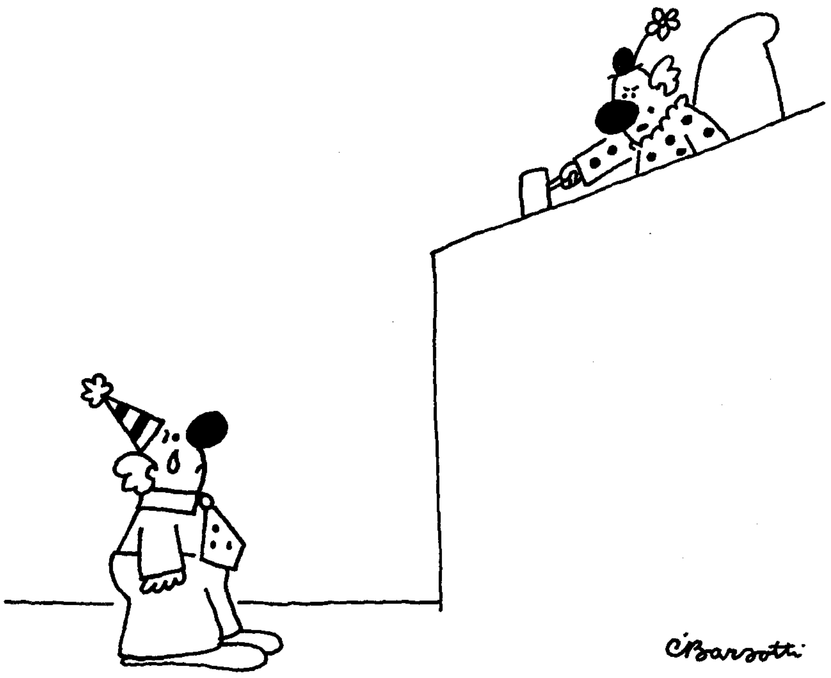
You will walk in the streets of southern cities,
Restored to your beginnings, seeing again in rapture
The whiteness of a garden after the first night of snow.

—Czeslaw Milosz

(*Translated, from the Polish, by the author and Robert Hass.*)

• •

THE air in May's house—one of two small bungalows behind the church—is stuffy with the chemical odors of carpeting. Most of the living room is taken up with a wooden-armed Colonial sofa, covered with a print of New England village scenes. The lamps and shades are part of the same set, and everything is very neat; the walls and ceiling are the same unfortunate light green. A man hasn't lived here in a long time—maybe never. There is a collection of china farm animals, and miniatures on a small hanging bookshelf. Barry pictures her adding to this collection, buying a new piece in Rylla and carrying it home in a box of cotton, taking it out and finding the best place for it on the shelf beside the other knickknacks, the woolly lamb, and the tea set for six. He sits on the sofa, following her with his ears as she wakes her boy, carries him to



*"Counsel is warned again: this court will not tolerate bathos."*

the toilet so he can pee, returns him to bed, and then begins to make coffee in the kitchen. There seems to have been no babysitter. Barry tries to figure out where the spare bedroom must be.

May talks to him from the kitchen—a confident intimacy, as if he had always been where she expects him to be and always would be. "You know, I'm still real skittish about that accident."

Barry yells back, "Yeah. There's something really frightening about an eye injury. Eyes seem so vulnerable, anyway."

She is obviously so struck by the aptness of this comment that she leans her head around the door to answer. "That's a real interesting point."

Barry is quite amazed that he is doing so well; it really has been some time since he's tried to converse. "I yes are so important," he yells back, now that she has returned to the stove. There is a clinking of cups and the rattle of a burner grate on a cheap range.

Barry scouts around the room, looking at the tabletops and the shallow window wells; except for a telephone book, there isn't a single printed word in the house, as far as he can tell. He finds that comforting. "This is very kind of you." He yells again. "This is a very nice home." He's learned in his travels to use the word "home" and not "house," to say "sack" for "paper bag," and to pump his own gas without paying first.

She comes in with coffee, looks around the room, and it's clear that she, too, is comforted by what she sees. "I like things to be nice," she says. She's relaxed in her private space; he thinks of Polly. He is upset, but then relieved to find that he can't really recall her face.

May shakes him out of his thoughts; he must have been quiet for a beat too long.

"I guess at noontime when you drove in you never thought you'd get involved in something like this," she says.

He isn't sure what she means by "this": her or the town. "You never know."

"It's not always exciting around here." She begins this statement quite straight, but realizes halfway through that it's funny.

"How can you stand it?" says Barry, and they both laugh. He hasn't used irony in weeks; at home, everything that everyone—his friends, people at work, Polly—says is indirect. May eyes him as if she had just realized that he's been holding out on her, that he's been playing possum behind all his Eastern reserve. He can tell the idea of making love to him is in her mind.

"Have you ever thought of leaving here?" he asks.

She's already told him she grew up on the other side of the Commerce Building, in a house that burned down. She shakes her head and shrugs at the same time. "It ain't the bright lights," she says, suddenly undreamy and unchildlike and very defensive, "but it's home."

Barry is busy slamming on the brakes. "Sure. You don't understand. I love it here."

"Mom?" It's Everett. His voice is just as fearful and squeaky as May made him sound in the café.

"Sh-h-h," says May to Barry, and crouches as if she were ducking the snare in her son's call.

"Mom? Who's there?"

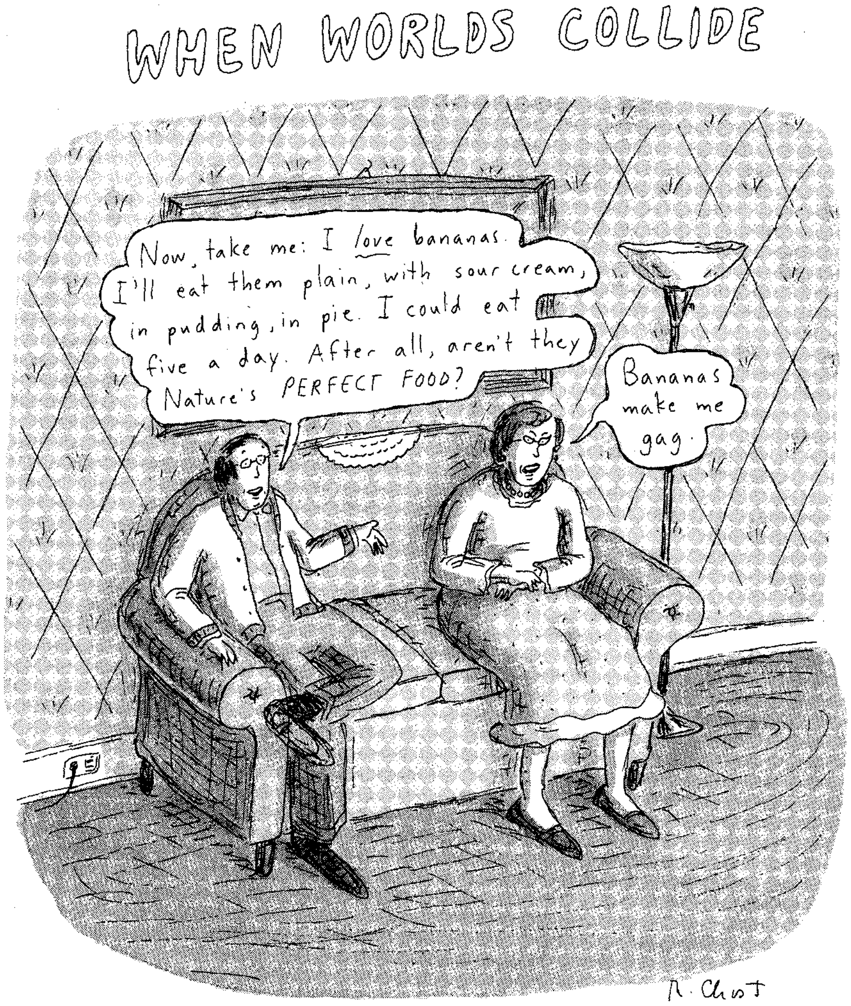
She gives up. "No one, honey. Go to sleep."

The boy starts to cry—not an entirely convincing cry, to Barry's trained ear. "I had a nightmare. I dreamed grachity was letting go and we all started to float."

May looks at Barry apologetically and leaves him. When she comes back, after a longer interval than Barry anticipated, she is holding clean, folded sheets, a pillow, and a towel—not a good sign. His heart sinks. But she sits down again beside him and puts her foot up on the sofa cushion between them, close enough to touch him, and after a few silent moments he drops his hand onto her calf. They talk, and then lean forward and kiss. Her saliva has a slightly odd taste and her mouth feels very different from Polly's; her back is hard and taut to his touch, but maybe she's just tense. They move to her bedroom, which is arranged just like a motel room, with a low dresser with a mirror above it along the wall opposite the bed. They start to unbutton and unzip each other's clothes, with a few nervous laughs, and then she pulls herself away to the bathroom in disarray. Barry catches sight of his reflection for a moment and tells himself, in a disbelieving and wildly thrilled way, that in a very few minutes it will be happening: he will plunge over one of the edges of his life with Polly. He wonders what it would be like to think of it as his "former" life. May comes back in a pink terry-cloth bathrobe, and it opens, at one point, right up to her waist. She turns out the light and slows things down, making him hold her in his arms for a few minutes in the darkness. Barry is startled by how good this feels—the pressure and heated silk of another's flesh. He has not had sex—or "made love" or whatever he should call this—in some weeks, and his stomach churns with desire; his ears seem to ring when, finally, her hand brushes him. She has almost no bottom, and her stomach is as flat as a teen-ager's. He finds softness here and there on her body. When he enters her she feels athletic, wiry as a runner, and she moves in pleasure. It makes him think of Polly's fuller, more cushioned body, inertly receiving, but it ends with a long, almost sweet, chirping from May, and his own surprised thank-yous.

Barry wakes up in the spare bedroom and looks out the window at the early morning. He's looking directly into a cemetery, close enough to read the names on many of the stones, to see the carved image of Calvary etched in the pink granite of the most recent gravestone. Beyond the barbed boundaries of this slightly green plot the yellow plains stretch out to a bare, purple rise. The events of the preceding day run quickly past his eyes—the first sight of town, meeting May, the boy's eye, his grandfather's cars: as recent as they are, Barry has the sensation that these random events have been awaiting him for many years. He looks at a life-size statue of Jesus in the center of the graveyard. It stands on a pedestal of rust-colored concrete marked with the phrase "I Am the Life" arranged in a triangle of letters, a word to a line.

He dresses with as little sound as possible, not because he wants to slip out but because he hears the boy out there. Soon there is the bustle of a child's being sent to school, and a door closing—presumably the bus is working again. Barry comes out at last. May is still in her bathrobe, and any embarrassment in this meeting is dispelled in a second. The kitchen's aluminum-legged table is set with two chairs, May's and Everett's. On the cramped counter behind her is a large school picture of the boy—he's nice-looking, with a very slender face—and Barry is relieved at not recognizing him from the roadside.


WHEN WORLDS COLLIDE
Now, take me: I love bananas. I'll eat them plain, with sour cream, in pudding, in pie. I could eat five a day. After all, aren't they Nature's PERFECT FOOD?
Bananas make me gag.
R. Chast

"You seem real rested," May says. It's clear she thinks it's her—and it is, in some part.

"Best I've felt in weeks."

"I slept pretty well myself," she says. She reaches back to rub her neck languidly.

"I like it here a lot," he says. He's sitting in Everett's seat. "I mean the land around here."

"Not much like home," she offers, although Barry doesn't remember telling her where home is. She assumes a position in front of the stove, waiting for his breakfast request.

"I can't explain it, but I feel there are answers here, on your plains. Do you know what I mean?"

She doesn't, really. She has turned her back to the stove.

"It may be a kind of unique place," he says.

Her expression darkens slightly as he tells her that the statue in the cemetery reminded him that Christ went out into the wilderness. "Forty days and forty nights," he hums, trying to get the melody of an old hymn.

"I wouldn't know," she says. "I'm not up on my Bible."

"Neither am I," he admits.

May is a little unnerved by this conversation; Barry sees this. She says, "When you're back with your wife and working at your new job you'll think of us. And Old Gordon's cars."

"I guess," he says. "But I think I'm going to stick around a little longer." Maybe it's time for him to admit—to himself, anyway—that he has left Polly and the girls for good, that he is never going back.

May rewraps her terry-cloth bathrobe tightly across her front and tightens the cord. "Here?"

"Well, I don't mean freeloading off you."

"Hey," she says, "I like it. You just make it sound a little permanent."

"I just mean I'd like to look around. Maybe see what's up in real estate."

"Here?" she asks again.

"Pretty crazy, isn't it?"

"I just don't understand. You mean *move* here? Why would anyone *do* that?"

Barry is losing clarity somewhat. "I'm married," he says. "I have children." He doesn't know why he is telling her this again, after the night before, but it *is* a reason. Isn't it? "Hell," says Barry. He means—and she clearly understands him to mean—that anything is possible in this world, that anything could make sense. "I'm looking for investment possibilities."

"Not here," May says. "Not in my town. I didn't invite you here because I'm looking for new neighbors."

"I can't ask you to understand."

"We had a nice time, a really nice time, but shouldn't you go home? There's nothing for you here."

"Maybe you have to come from the outside."

"Well," she says. She shrugs. "This whole damn county, this whole state, is going down the tubes. You'd have to be nuts . . ." Her thought trails off. Barry can't debate with her. In fact, he's starting to feel quite pushed and frustrated by what she is saying: his chest tightens, which is exactly what happens when he's on the phone with Polly. Being alone, after all, means you can think your own thoughts without interference.

She goes to the sink to do dishes; he never even got a cup of coffee. He thinks of her body inside the bathrobe and wishes they could make love again. It could still happen; if he shows up at her door at ten tonight, she may tell him she's so glad he hasn't left yet, that she hopes he'll stay a while longer. Or maybe during the day she'll think vaguely that he'll come back, but she'll be here in the evening and he'll be hundreds of miles away.

This morning, the time for them is past, though, that's for sure. He's said or done something a little weird—not that he knows exactly what it is. Now that everything is settled, now that she believes she'll never see him again, she's cheerful. "You going to see your granddad's place again on your way out? You sure seemed impressed."

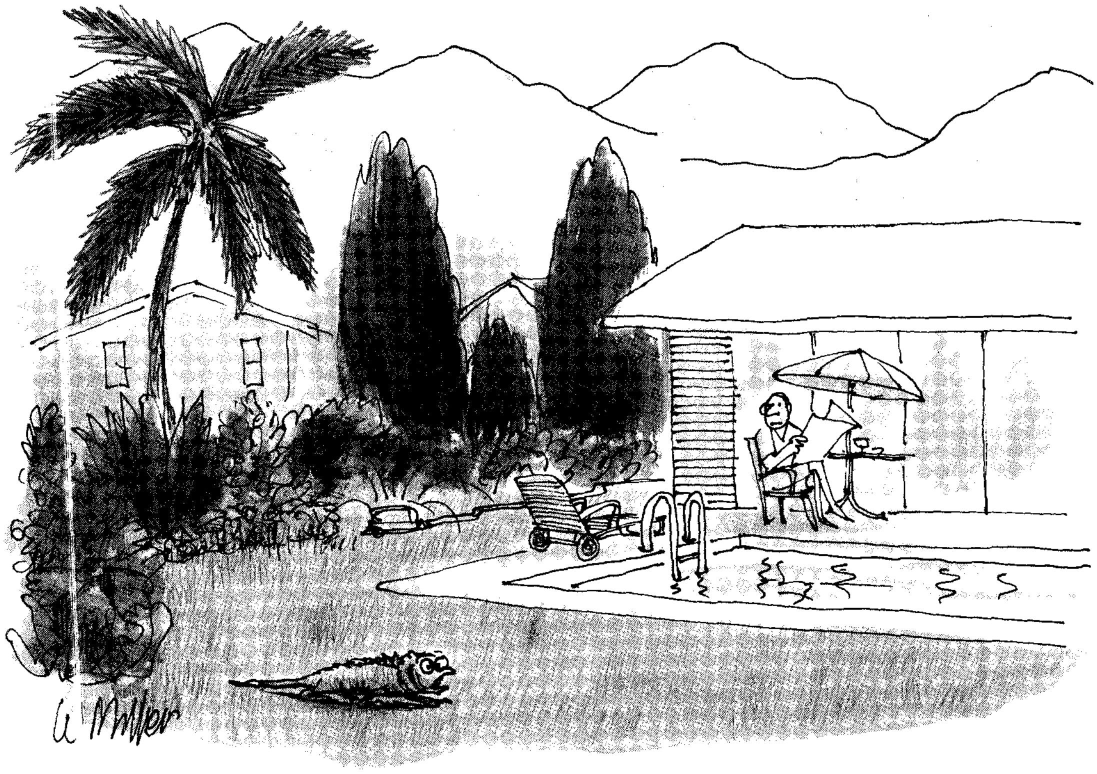
He remembers that he carried on a bit about it after they were done with lovemaking. He doesn't answer, wondering if he should be angry about any of this, about May's sleeping with him and then throwing him out, about his grandfather's having left no message or sign for him but a field of junked cars, about Polly, a thin reed at the end of a telephone line, charting his decline like a stockbroker hoping to find his fifty-two-week low.

"Quite a place," says May. She is referring to his grandfather's.

Still in her bathrobe, May sees him out the door. A reddish sun is rising over a very cold morning. Barry walks down the dusty path by the church and comes out facing the middle of the Commerce Building. He can see a sign, an incongruously cute rebus, in one of the empty storefronts, "Fred and Alice's Used 🪰-4 Store." Quite a place, he thinks as he throws his toilet kit into the trunk of his car. He fishes for a map, not one for a specific state but the one he rarely uses: the western half of the country, from the Mississippi to the Pacific. It spreads out across the dashboard and fills the entire windshield. Thousands of shattered, ruined towns—pulses of light in his own darkened sky.

He turns, finally, for Rylla. It's west, and the sun pushes down on him. Two or three miles out of town he makes out a large shape on the side of the road. It's the school bus, the town's bus, and he assumes it has broken down again: the front door, the emergency exit, and the hood are all open. But as he draws close he sees no sign of the children; it's a little spooky, as if the bus had been waylaid. He gets out of his car and calls, but there is no answer. He pokes his head in the doorway of the bus and calls again. The key is in the ignition, and on an impulse he tries it, but the engine doesn't catch. He knows perfectly well that none of this is his business, and he is about to turn his back when he notices an end of a pink blanket peeping out into the aisle of haze-gray seats. He walks back and picks it up, recognizing it as the beloved and trusted friend of that little girl, Winona. For a moment his mind floods with images: ankle socks, size-six T-shirts, dolls, and vinyl purses shiny with sequins. He quickly drops the blanket back on the seat, and backs out the door into the prairie, and stands there surveying the bounds of this vast, ownerless domain, wondering if this is really the way these things happen, the way people run.

—CHRISTOPHER TILGHMAN



*"Sand! Sand!"*

# THE WORLD OF BUSINESS

## LEAP OF FAITH

ON the evening of Sunday, November 18, 1990, a group of key executives and advisers from MCA Inc., the United States entertainment giant, and from the Matsushita Electric Industrial Company, one of the world's largest consumer-electronics manufacturers, gathered for dinner in a rococo-style restaurant called La Régence, at New York's Plaza Athénée Hotel. The chairman of MCA, Lew Wasserman, an imposing, ascetic-looking man and, at seventy-seven, Hollywood's reigning patriarch, rose to toast his companions and welcome the Japanese. Then, referring to a process they would all be embarking upon the next morning, he declared, "We've come here to make a deal. If we do, that's fine—and if we don't, that's fine, too."

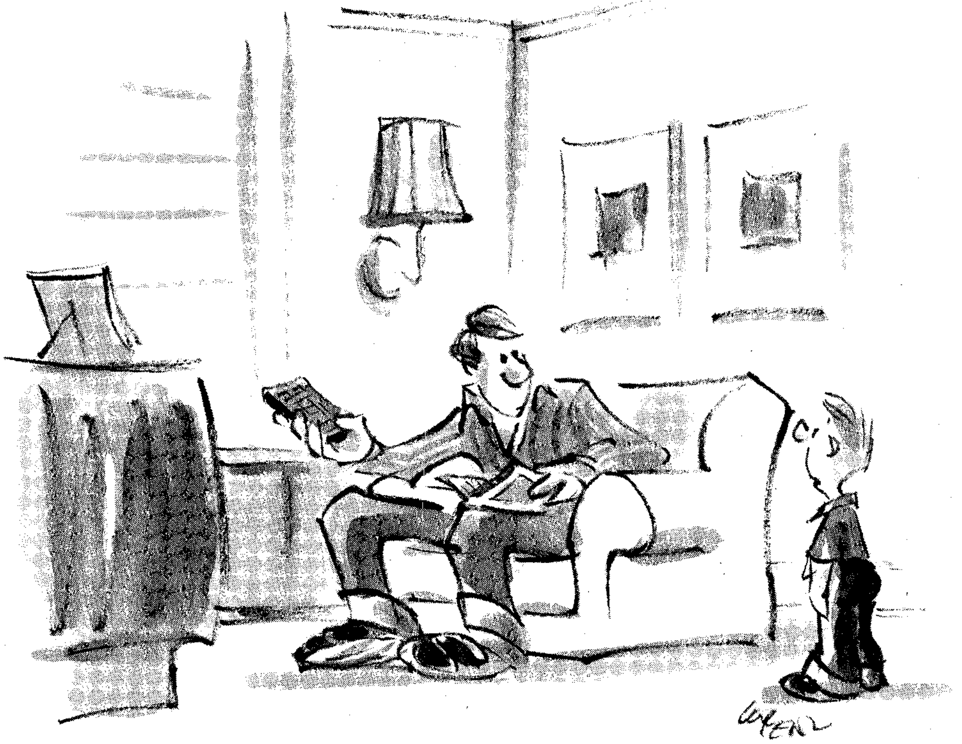
Such professed equanimity might have seemed mere posturing in another seller, particularly if his personal stake in a deal of between six and seven billion dollars would amount—as Wasserman's would, if the deal were to be consummated—to several hundred million dollars. But everyone at the table was fully, even uncomfortably, cognizant that Wasserman had a much demonstrated capacity for walking away from deals. "For fifty-nine years, Lew Wasserman has been doing deals, and he doesn't ever show his cards," one of his attorneys told me. "I have been in many sessions with Lew where he stands up, politely says goodbye, and the other side never sees him again."

As dinner wore on, conversation between the assembled dealmakers grew labored and fitful. Keiya Toyonaga, the head of international affairs and legal administration for Matsushita, found that he could converse in French with Felix Rohatyn, MCA's investment banker, but the bulk of the exchange between the Americans and the Japanese was carried on through interpreters, in that uniquely disjunctive idiom. One strained gambit followed another until, a participant recalled, "I heard Sidney"—Sidney Sheinberg, the president and chief operating officer of MCA—"say, 'It's so terrible, the price of melons in Japan.' And then one of the Japanese gave a very long, serious explanation of why melons are so expensive—because they are delicate, and they have to be protected, and all the energy expended in sheltering them in these ways means that they have to be expensive. I couldn't believe it. Here we were, about to embrace in one of the greatest mergers—it was the seduction scene—and people were talking about the price of melons!"

It should not really have been so confounding that communication on this nuptial eve was stilted and barren—not in light of the immense cultural divide between the two companies and, even more, the anomalous nature of their courtship. Until that moment, at the commencement of what would be a week of torturous negotiations, virtually every aspect of the courtship had been choreographed and controlled by one man, a Hollywood talent agent named Michael Ovitz.

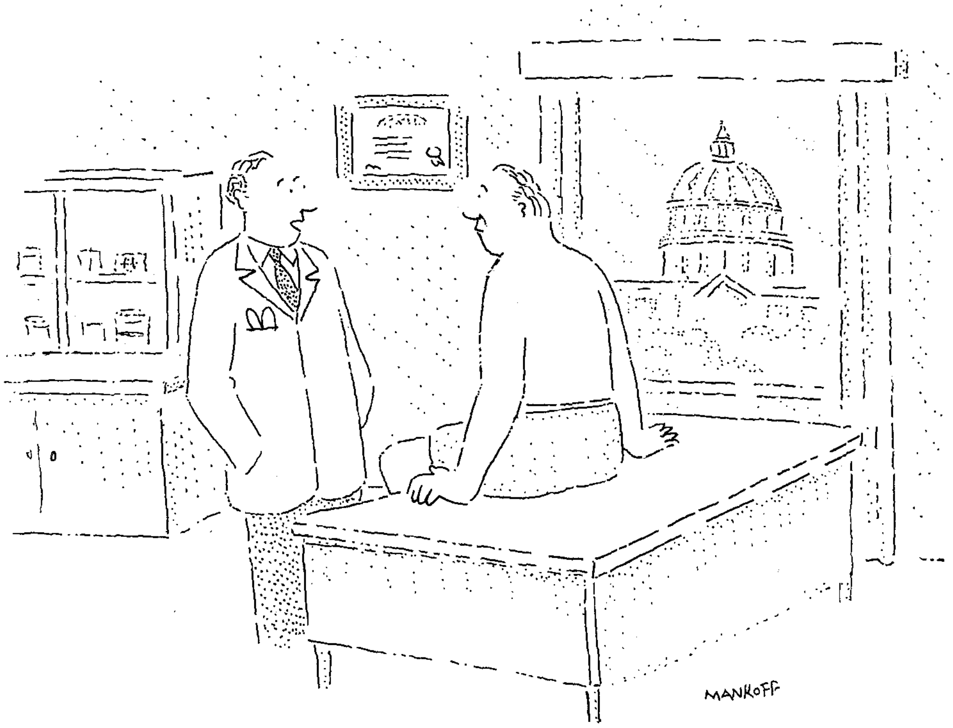
Matsushita had met with Ovitz a year earlier, after determining that—like its sometime rival, Sony, which had just acquired Columbia Pictures—it was interested in making a "software" (film, television, and music) acquisition to complement its consumer electronic "hardware" products. To Matsushita-watchers, it was not a wholly unexpected move. Over the past several decades, Matsushita had gained a reputation as a cautious follower. While Sony prided itself on being first to launch new products in the market, Matsushita often supplied modified versions at lower prices, and attempted to sell them to more customers. In following the trailblazing Sony into Hollywood, then, Matsushita was in one sense adhering to its time-tested formula. In all other respects, however, it was Matsushita that was committing itself to the more daring and radical course of action.

Sony, which was founded after the Second World War and is based in Tokyo, is probably the most cosmopolitan and "Western" of all Japanese companies; it sells more than seventy per cent of its goods abroad. Under the aegis of its co-founder, Akio Morita, who was so intent on building his business outside Japan that he moved to this country for a number of years, Sony put a heavy premium on creativity, and cultivated an environment that



*"During the next stage of my development, Dad, I'll be drawing closer to my mother—I'll get back to you in my teens."*

encourages a degree of outspokenness unusual in a Japanese company Sony also recruits personnel from competitors—a most un-Japanese practice. It was one of the first Japanese companies to pursue the policy of "global localization" that others are now following—building products in the markets where they are sold and putting foreigners at the helm of the local subsidiaries. Earlier this year, Michael Schulhof became vice-chairman of Sony USA and president of Sony Software; in 1989, he had been named to the parent company's board of directors—the first American businessman to become a board member of a major Japanese corporation. Notwithstanding Sony's relative ease with Western ways, however, the company only gradually waded into the world of American entertainment; it participated in an extremely lucrative joint venture with CBS Records for nearly twenty years before buying that company, in 1987, and then, in 1989, it acquired Columbia Pictures.



*"Bad news—that fire in your belly is an ulcer."*

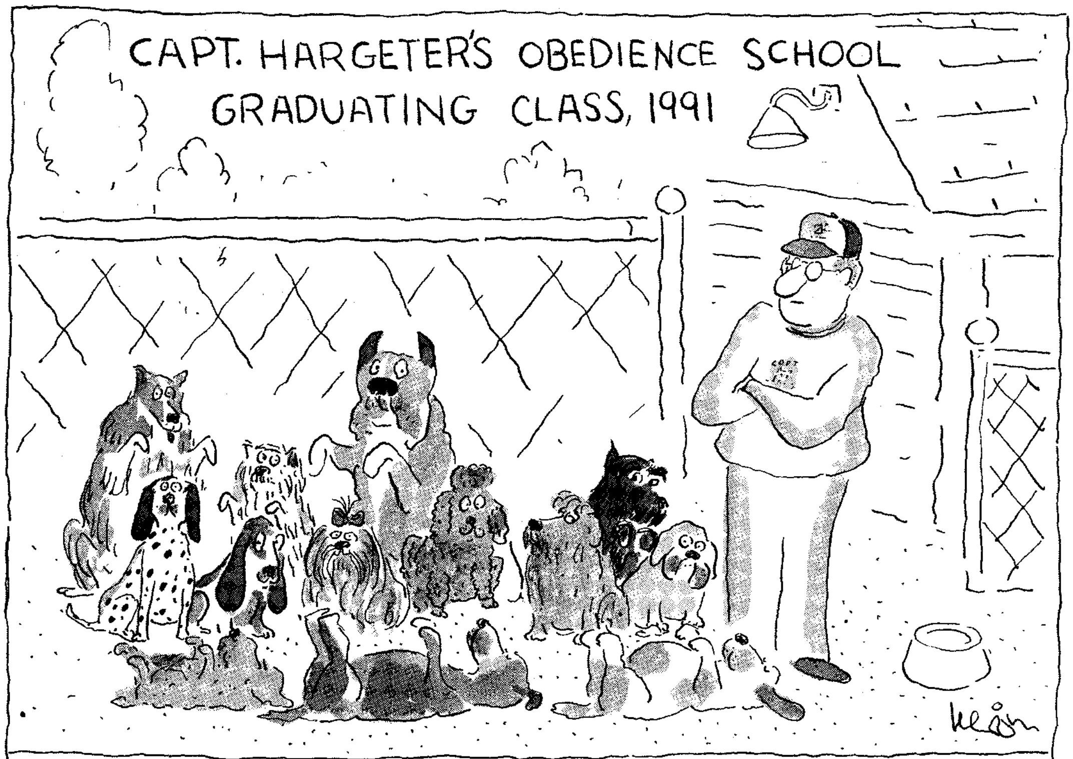
Matsushita, based not in Tokyo but in the more hidebound, old-money city of Osaka, has been a conservative company, steeped in the philosophy of its legendary founder, Konosuke Matsushita, who is worshipped by Japanese workers as "the god of business management." He started the company in 1918, and eventually became messianic about his goal: providing as many electric fans, light bulbs, radios, and other household appliances as possible at as low a price as possible, not only to make a profit but also to achieve a social good. (Christening this his "water-supply philosophy," he imagined a world in which one would be able to acquire electronic equipment for the home as easily as one obtains water from a faucet.)

The inauguration of Konosuke Matsushita's philosophical approach to his company occurred on May 5, 1932, when he assembled his office workers and announced his business philosophy and a two-hundred-and-fifty-year corporate plan, divided into twenty-five-year sections. That philosophy has since been codified in a company "creed" and in the Seven Spirits of Matsushita, which are generally recited, along with the singing of the company song, "Love, Light, and a Dream," at morning assemblies. Moreover, what is referred to as "spiritual training" (a study of the Matsushita philosophy) constitutes a substantial part of the indoctrination of many white-collar employees, both in Japan and at Matsushita subsidiaries abroad, and is continued as a part of the corporate regimen.

After focussing in its early years on domestic dominance, the firm of Matsushita moved in the sixties and seventies to internationalize its business. By the mid-eighties—thanks largely to its success with the videocassette recorder—it had become the world's largest producer of consumer electronic products (Panasonic, Technics, Quasar). But the company's president at that time, Toshihiko Yamashita, worried that the company's most powerful profit generators—international exports and the VCR—had both begun to weaken. He undertook two broad-based programs: Operation Localization, to build innovation and self-sufficiency in the company's foreign-based plants; and ACTION, to revitalize and refocus the company. In past decades, Matsushita had relied on its ability to improve upon an innovator's product; but, as Yamashita expressed it in 1986, "life cycles of products have become shorter, and technological innovations more rapid. For example, the product costs of large-scale integrated circuits become half in six months. If we cannot lead to develop products at the beginning, we will never catch up. R. & D. has become the key to success."

Some observers believed that Matsushita's corporate culture had bred stagnation. A former Matsushita employee, quoted in the magazine *Keizaikai* ("Business World") in the fall of 1990, said of that culture, "It is too homogeneous, and no matter where you look, you see the same thing, and no original thought. This is why Matsushita's internal reorganization initiatives . . . did not lead to any greater improvement." The former employee was also quoted as saying that Akio Tanii, who had become the company president in February of 1986, was different from the earlier Matsushita presidents: "He can accept a modern way of thinking. He understands that today diversification is the key to success, and that this is not compatible with a highly homogeneous company. . . . My assumption is that he expects that acquiring MCA will bring about the change he is seeking."

For the Matsushita executives, embarking on their Hollywood expedition may have felt almost interplanetary. They were setting out for a place that was far more foreign to their temperament, culture, and busi-



PLAYING DEAD: MUFFY, PRINCE, BOBO. STANDING: CAPT. HARGETER. SITTING: SPOT, GORBY, TOFU, FLUFFY, TERRY, BUSTER. BEGGING: OREO, TOTO, RAMBO, SCOTTIE. NOT SHOWN (FETCHING): TOBY, TUTU, ROXIE.

ness experience than it had been to Sony's. While Sony executives are noted for their outspokenness, Matsushita's are known for their modesty. ("The higher you climb in the hierarchy, the more modest you become," a middle-level Matsushita executive once told the writer James Lardner.) And when they met Ovitz they were apparently quite open about their perception of themselves as innocents, who were attempting to bridge not only the distance between dissonant cultures but the distance between technology and art. One is said to have inquired eagerly of Ovitz, "Tell me, Michael, how does the creative mind work?"

Ovitz, a man who prides himself on his ability to take the measure of others, apparently persuaded the Matsushita men that he alone could safely guide them through Hollywood's treacherous shoals. For months, he and several assistants from his talent agency, the Creative Artists Agency (CAA), tutored a Matsushita team in entertainment-industry fundamentals. He led Matsushita to its selection of MCA and, early in the process, he also began laying the groundwork with MCA's chairman, Wasserman, and its president, Sheinberg. It was Ovitz, not Matsushita, who selected the lawyers, investment bankers, and public-relations specialists to represent the company in the transaction. It was through him that this roster of advisers communicated with the client. And it was through him that Matsushita communicated with MCA, and MCA with Matsushita. Although the bedrock assumption of the deal, according to Ovitz and, later, Matsushita, was that existing management would remain in place, it was Ovitz's desire that contact between the principals be as limited as possible. And, indeed, prior to the dinner at the Plaza Athénée they had met only once—for an evening at Wasserman's home, six weeks earlier.

So if at that connubial dinner they seemed like strangers it was because they were. The proposed union had been arranged, one MCA executive in Hollywood remarked to me, as "a classic brokered wedding." Had MCA's suitor been an American company, or even a European one, he went on, it would have been unimaginable for that principal to give so much license to a single individual—or not to have sought to become better acquainted with the executives who would be leading its multibillion-dollar investment into the future. Rolling his eyes, the executive added, "Only this town, built on fable, could allow a scenario like this to have unfolded."

OVITZ, a short, sandy-haired man of forty-four who exercises diligently (in a regimen that includes an hour of aikido at dawn) to maintain the physique of a man in his twenties, appears to give a lot of thought to the manner in which he presents himself to others; every move and inflection seems perfectly calibrated. One person who has worked with Ovitz told me, "He has an almost Rasputin-like ability to focus his eyes on you. He uses his voice in a soothing, harmonic way—it does something to your brain waves. And he speaks a few decibels lower, to make you strain to hear. Because of that, you're constantly paying attention, leaning toward him. He has an aura." Or, as another colleague observed, "Michael Ovitz knows how to forge his image."

In the process of representing Matsushita, he was forging his public image for the wider world as well. For Ovitz, who sets aside time each summer to plot his life in one-, three-, and five-year segments, his role in the Matsushita-MCA deal was the product of long-term strategy and maneuvering—a painstakingly meticulous weaving of threads, some of which had been drawn through the length of his Hollywood career.

Central to his design was Wasserman, who for the past twenty years had been to Ovitz an almost iconographic figure—a man whom he observed, analyzed, and sought to emulate. The presence of the Japanese was also symbolic for Ovitz, who was an aficio-

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nado of Oriental culture and put to use here insights that he had gleaned over time. A Hollywood executive who has known him for many years told me that, long before Sony and Matsushita, "Mike was having his agents read 'The Art of War,' by Sun Tzu, and talking about *wa*"—a Japanese word meaning "harmony" or "concord." The executive went on, "He sees himself as the embodiment and apotheosis of Japanese culture in this industry—and he believes that the Japanese like and respect the fact that he understands them so well." And, finally, the transaction lent form and substance to what many who know Ovitz believe had become his overriding ambition in recent years: to transcend his role as a talent agent, as Wasserman had done many years before.

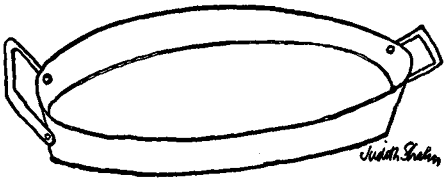
Ovitz, who grew up in a working-class neighborhood in the San Fernando Valley, in the shadow of Beverly Hills' high-toned splendors, began very early to set what might have seemed inordinately ambitious goals for himself. In 1975, seven years after he graduated from U.C.L.A. and got a job in the mailroom of the William Morris talent agency, he and several of his fellow-employees left to start their own company, CAA. They had only a handful of clients among them. But Ovitz began a series of assiduous courtships. He courted the young business managers and entertainment lawyers who were also just starting out, and many of them, over time, became vital to his network. He courted television executives, to whom he offered his services at no charge in return for the access he gained. And, perhaps most assiduously of all, he courted the New York literary agent Morton Janklow, who—representing such writers as Judith Krantz and Sidney Sheldon—was an ideal source of properties for network series and miniseries.

Janklow recalls his first phone call from Ovitz. "He said, 'My name is Michael Ovitz—I wouldn't expect you to know me. I'm twenty-eight years old. Four other guys and I have left William Morris and opened up our own shop. I'm not going to lie to you—we're using bridge tables for desks, our wives are manning the phones. But I will tell you that I'm going to build the biggest agency the world has ever known in ten years. And you are the key to my success.' "

It was vintage Ovitz—the grandiose assertion and, even more, the unabashed flattery. The relentlessness that followed was trademark, too. What Ovitz was proposing was that Janklow show him galleys of forthcoming novels; he would line up appropriate actors, writer, and director for each project, and then sell the "packages" to one of the networks. Janklow was noncommittal but willing to listen, so Ovitz flew to New York. Janklow told me that Ovitz entered his office, took off his watch, put it on the desk, and said he would take only a half hour of Janklow's time. "He made this driven, dramatic pitch, with tremendous intensity and, I thought, incredible intelligence—and after thirty minutes, exactly, he put his watch back on and left."

Ovitz asked Janklow if he would take a call from him every Thursday morning at ten-thirty. Janklow assented. It became an office joke: every Thursday, moments before ten-thirty, Janklow's secretary would say, "Mr. Ovitz will be calling," and, at the appointed minute, the phone would ring. "He kept up a constant level of communication," Janklow said. "He was undaunted." Eventually, Janklow gave Ovitz a chance, with a widely rejected property; Ovitz quickly packaged and sold it; and their relationship grew. Over the last ten years or so, the two have become so close that they function, albeit informally, as partners.

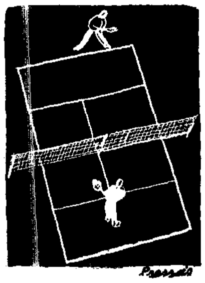
By the mid-eighties—right on schedule—CAA had emerged as the dominant Hollywood agency, with a stable of about six hundred clients, including many of the most sought-after actors, actresses, writers, and directors. Ovitz had succeeded in creating a near-monopoly—along the lines of the one that Wasserman had shaped years earlier, when MCA was the world's strongest talent agency. Now CAA controlled an extraordinary amount of the talent. It controlled much of the best story material. It packaged these elements, in an all-or-nothing deal, for movies as well as for television projects. And, since it controlled so much of the product, its agents were able to demand record-breaking contracts from the buyers—the networks and the studios. "In this town, we always say, everyone is either a buyer or a seller—and sometimes both," one Hollywood executive remarked to me. Ovitz was a seller, but he was a seller who controlled so much of the supply that few buyers could afford to offend him.



Ovitz's close friend Alfred Checchi, a co-chairman of NWA, Inc., the parent company of Northwest Airlines, told me, "Michael has developed a spiderweb of connections, though I don't mean that in a sinister sense. He realizes that his assets are relationships. He is always meshing—his agents, his clients, the studios, the networks, the small production companies. He has a capacity to relate to whole bunches of people in that web—and he always realizes that a twang over here has repercussions over there. So much of Mike's life is about sizing people up, seeing where the weaknesses are. He makes fewer mistakes in the area of people than anyone I know."

At CAA, Ovitz built a highly disciplined, highly motivated, and well-compensated work force. Just as Wasserman at MCA many years before had imposed a strict dress code of black suits, white shirts, and black ties, Ovitz now insisted that all his young agents be sombre-suited and well groomed. Wasserman in his earlier years had kept a low profile and zealously guarded business information, refusing, for example, to release an MCA client list or to say what television series the agency represented; Ovitz, too, forbade his agents to speak about CAA to the press, and—until a story about him appeared on the front page of the *Wall Street Journal* in December, 1986—was known only in the insular Hollywood community. If CAA was in many respects an adaptation of MCA, however, it was MCA with a New Age twist: the ethos that Ovitz preached was collectivism—a blend of team sports and Eastern-style management techniques somewhat reminiscent of the human-potential movement of the early seventies.

Indeed, some who have dealt regularly with CAA feel that many of its employees evince a cultlike quality—in their uncritical worship of Ovitz, their superefficiency and seriousness of purpose, their excitement at being part of his grand scheme, their readiness to carry out whatever directives he issues. "A client would leave, and they would actually try to destroy his or her career," a former CAA agent told me. "It wasn't 'O.K., hope you find what you're looking for, go in peace.' It was 'That person is a bad person. They have screwed us. Now we will go out and target them.' There actually were groups called 'attack teams.' "



Ovitz drilled his agents in the power of perception: if they said they were hot in the music area, then they soon would be. "In Hollywood," he was fond of saying, "illusion is reality." Ovitz seems to have been the most accomplished practitioner of his credo. According to one former CAA employee, "Whenever some deal at the agency failed, Ovitz would say to the assembled group, 'You guys will understand this in six to eight months.' It was a defeat, but he would mask it as a victory. Or he would say, 'There are major things that will be going on at Columbia Pictures in the next four to six months. Don't worry about it, we're on top of it.' The magic, always, was that he knew. He was controlling everyone's strings. He was the puppeteer."

Ovitz's penchant for secrecy may have gone hand in hand with the creation of illusion; the more covert his activities, the more room he had for maneuvering. One executive who has dealt with him commented to me, "If you are the only one who knows, then you have the ability to construct the chronicle later on. You are the touchstone of fact, the master storyteller."

While Ovitz borrowed from Wasserman in business, he differentiated himself in his personal life. Wasserman through most of his career was so consumed by MCA—sixteen hours a day, seven days a week—that he seemed to have no other interests. Ovitz is voluble on the subject of his devotion to his family; he and his wife, Judy, have three children. And he has amassed a significant art collection—modern and contemporary paintings and sculpture, African antiquities, and Old Master drawings—some of which is displayed in a gallery in his home. In the early eighties, when he decided that he wanted to begin collecting art seriously, Janklow introduced him to Arnold Glimcher, the owner of Pace Galleries, in Manhattan, and Ovitz later assisted Glimcher in his entry into Hollywood. (Glimcher has just finished directing the movie "Mambo Kings.") "I had never met anybody who was so intent on knowing everything about anything he was involved in," Glimcher says. "It was exhausting." A few years later, when Ovitz began collecting African art, Glimcher gave him various books on the subject. "About a month later, he started asking me the most ethnographically eccentric questions. I swear he had memorized those books. People say, 'What is Michael Ovitz about?' Michael Ovitz is about self-improvement. He has an amazing appetite."

In 1988, Glimcher introduced Ovitz to I. M. Pei, whom Ovitz wanted to commission to design a new building for CAA. (A friend of Ovitz's remarked to me, "Pei had done the Louvre, and the National Gallery—it mattered to Mike to have someone who had done these prestige institutions.") Glimcher has recalled, "I called I.M., and he said, 'I can't do that little building.' I said, 'Please—he'll drive me crazy. Just meet with him.' " They met, and Pei explained that he would not do it. "Michael would not take no for an answer, though," Glimcher continued. And after four or five more meetings Pei acquiesced.

At the groundbreaking ceremony, Chinese priests in colorful robes—accompanied by trumpet players and by flocks of white doves released from cages—performed the ancient ritual of fêng-shui, to ensure spiritual harmony and good luck. Pei told me that when he saw this scene, in a short film that Ovitz had commissioned about the construction of his building, he was amused. "It tickled me so! Chasing away the evil spirits! The question is, Can one believe in it? Even in China, it is something which is not done much today." Showing me a photograph of the Bank of China in Hong Kong, a gleaming tower he designed, Pei said, "They did not bless the ground there. Later, I said something joking about that to Michael, and he did not respond. I saw he was serious."

The CAA edifice, which cost an estimated fifteen to twenty million dollars and has a domed exterior and a soaring atrium, may have signified many things to Ovitz. It was a reflec-

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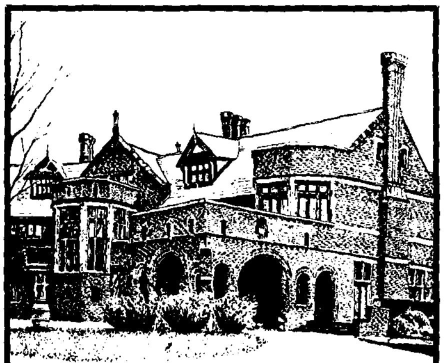

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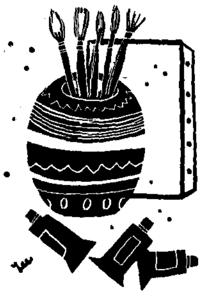
tion of his aesthetic sensibility, a grandiloquent statement about his place in the world, a well-planned stage set suitable to his coming productions (playing host to his Matsushita clients, for example). Given Ovitz's lack of irony about himself, what this classical construct was not, however, was a fit subject for levity. A former CAA employee recalled a celebratory dinner at which a model of the building, covered with a sheet, stood on a table in the center of the room. At the appointed moment, with Ovitz standing alongside, two attendants pulled off the sheet. One agent—struck by what he deemed a likeness to a hotel in Hawaii, popular with the entertainment crowd—exclaimed, "It looks like the Mauna Lani!" And then the hapless agent "seemed like he was ready to die—it had just slipped out before he could stop it," his colleague said. "Ovitz's eyes gleamed—but he just moved on."

While the building was a stunning monument to Ovitz's success, its very grandeur, in a sense, bespoke his frustration: it seemed markedly overstated for a talent agency. The business has become more respectable than it was years ago—when, as Wasserman once said, it was "considered the lowest level of endeavor," when agents were derided as flesh peddlers, when they were portrayed in movies, as, in the words of one former agent, "the schlemiel, the putz, the guy who was always saying, 'Let me get you a drink, please don't fire me' "—but it is still a service business, devoted to a largely egocentric, demanding, high-strung clientele. Alfred Checchi, the NWA co-chairman, told me, "Mike has built an incredible infrastructure for a delivery system of services. I was talking to his secretary the other day, and I said, joking, 'You know, I'm having a problem, I need a good astrologer'—and before I could laugh she clicked off, then came back on in seconds with a phone number." And the reality of what Ovitz had to do, day to day, apparently did not escape him. Several years ago, an agent who is now a Hollywood executive recalls, Ovitz said to him ruefully that if agents were supposed to be so rich and so powerful, how come they were mere servants "to the stars, to these people we hate?"

The power that Ovitz had managed to amass by the late eighties, moreover, carried within it a conundrum that seems to have dogged him. The Hollywood community—perhaps because it creates no hard, consistent product but, rather, traffics in chimeras; and because, more than in most creative endeavors, what will succeed is often unknowable; and because desirability and fame are in such perpetual flux—is roiled with insecurity. Ovitz, his friend Checchi has noted, became a master at pinpointing the weaknesses of others. That he has used this skill to his advantage has not gone unnoticed; many who know him consider him an uncommonly cold manipulator—extreme even by Hollywood standards. For years, Ovitz appeared to be gratified by the fear he aroused. One longtime colleague of his told me, "Mike has almost perfected the art of saying something nice and making you shiver."

Such dominions, of course, are inherently unstable, and Ovitz is himself no stranger to insecurity. In the earlier years of his success, according to one of his close friends, Ovitz was driven by the fear that "it was all going to be taken away from him—that at any moment he could lose it all, and he'd be back in the Valley." Even as recently as a year ago, one of his friends told me, Ovitz commented on the tenuousness of his position, saying, "I only have power because I control these seventy to a hundred people"—his top clients. "If they left me, I would have to leave town tomorrow. I would be run out of town."



Such a conviction on Ovitz's part may have influenced his response to the departure of one successful client, the scriptwriter Joe Eszterhas, in the fall of 1989—if comments that Eszterhas has since attributed to Ovitz were in fact made. In a letter from Eszterhas to Ovitz that became public in mid-October, 1989, Eszterhas claimed that when he met with Ovitz and told him he intended to leave, Ovitz said, among other things, "My foot soldiers who go up and down Wilshire Boulevard each day will blow your brains out." Ovitz was also said to have explained the vehemence of his reaction by saying that if Eszterhas left, other clients would follow. Esz-

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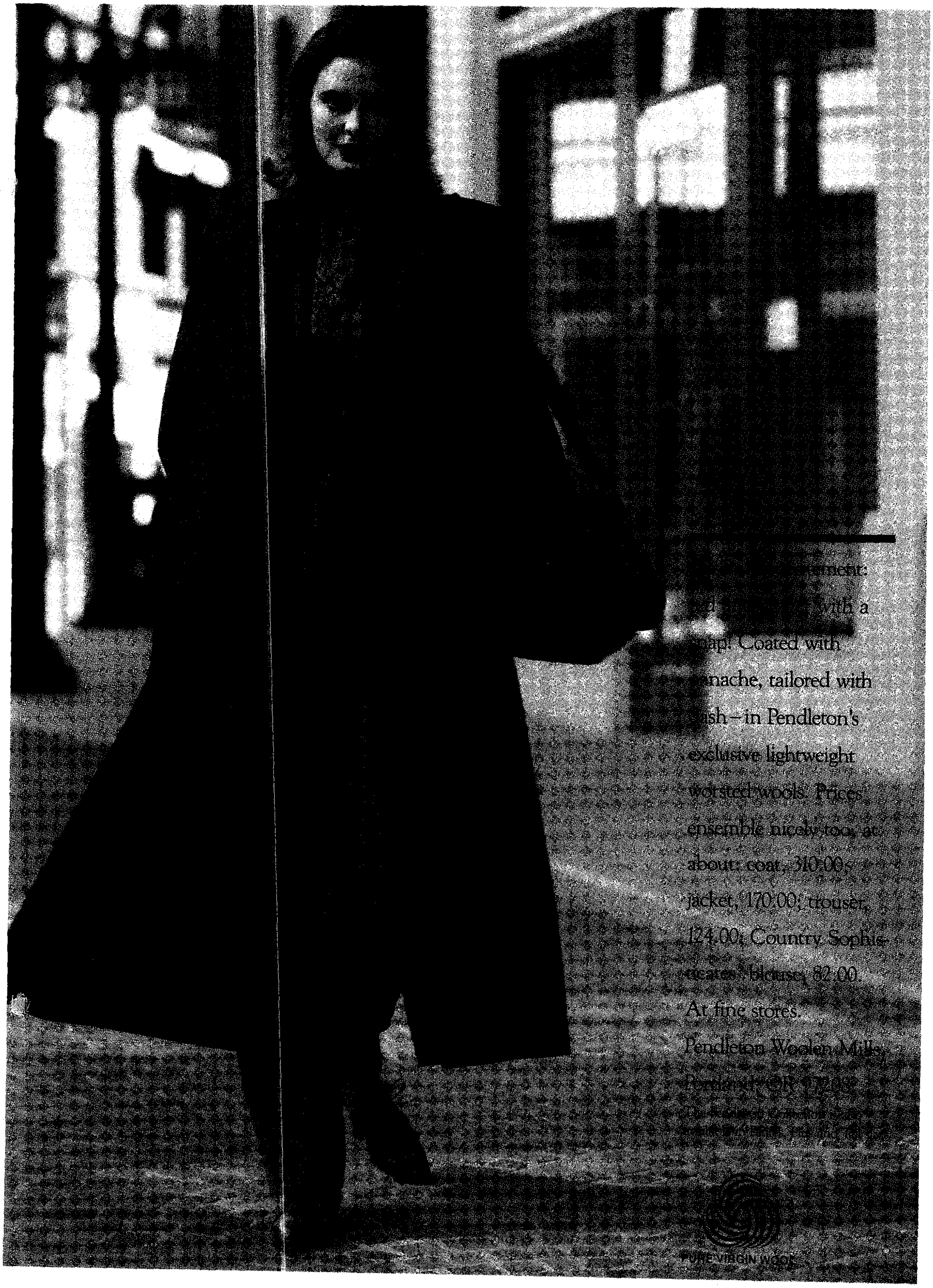

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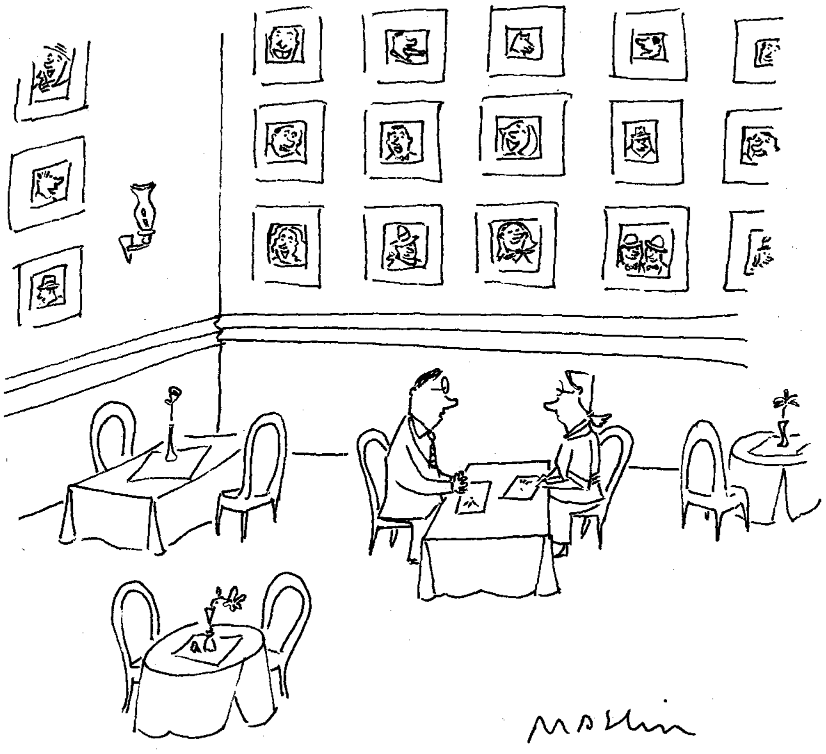


*"I'm in love with you, Miss Bales, retroactive to the day we met."*

terhas claimed, furthermore, that another CAA agent, Rand Holston, subsequently warned him that Ovitz was the best friend anyone could have and the worst enemy. "Mike's going to put you into the fucking ground," Holston was alleged to have said in detailing how studio executives would be warned away from hiring him.

After the contents of Eszterhas' letter became public, CAA issued a denial of Eszterhas' allegations and released a letter Ovitz had written to Eszterhas, in which he replied that he was "totally shocked" by Eszterhas' recollection of their conversation. "Truly this appears to be one of those Rashomon situations, and your letter simply makes little or no sense to me," he wrote. "I want to make it eminently clear that in no way will I, Rand or anyone else in this agency, stand in the way of your pursuing your career. So please, erase from your mind any of your erroneous anxieties or thoughts you may have to the contrary."

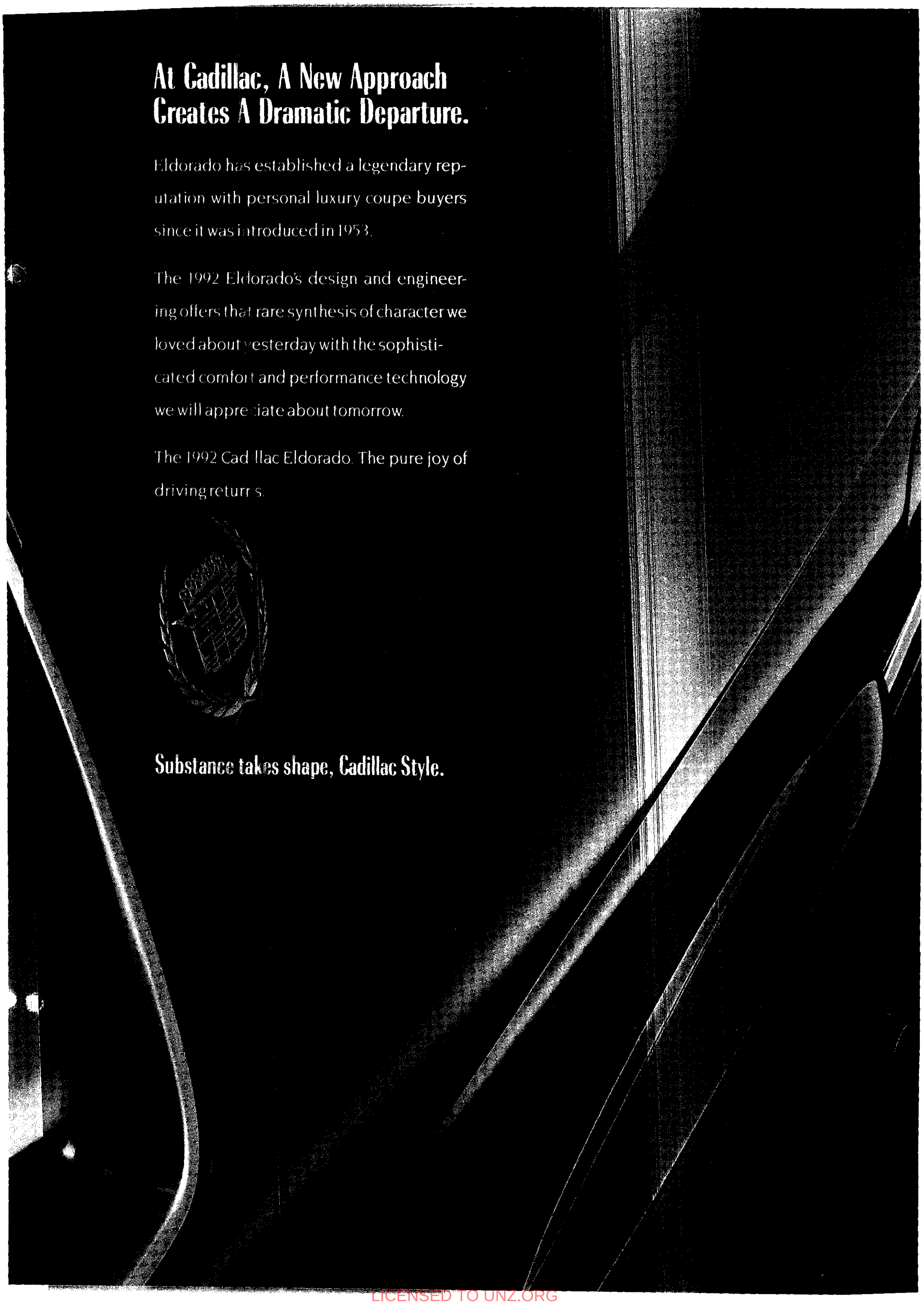
According to several of Ovitz's friends, the Eszterhas affair shook him badly. He hired one of the deans of the Los Angeles bar, Seth Hufstedler, to represent him vis-à-vis the Writers Guild of America, which ultimately released a statement akin to a consent decree, in which CAA neither admitted nor denied the substance of Eszterhas' allegations but agreed to refrain from such conduct in the future. The affair dragged on in public view for months—months during which, moreover, Ovitz was beginning to cultivate his relationship with Matsushita—and was given extended currency with *Spy's* publication, in January, 1990, of the complete, unexpurgated (and annotated) Eszterhas-Ovitz correspondence. Eszterhas' claims found wide credence. "There are not more than five per cent of the people in this town who believe Mike's version of that story," a prominent colleague of Ovitz's said. "That 'foot soldier' speech sounds exactly like him." And Ovitz, according to one associate, felt exposed, as if the veneer of refinement he had built up so carefully had been ripped away. "It drove him crazy," another colleague said. "His Achilles' heel is that he cannot stand for people to know about the things he does."

WHETHER Ovitz uttered those words to Eszterhas or not, the painful, prolonged incident could only have intensified his desire to escape from the vagaries of the agency business. And he had, in fact, designed a plan that would have enabled him to do just that—and had presented it to Sony—only a couple of months before the Eszterhas meeting occurred. Ovitz had been hired as Sony's Hollywood consultant in 1988, when the company decided to make a studio acquisition. While it was a milestone for Ovitz—the first major corporate deal in which he played a significant part—it established no precedent for the role he later assumed with Matsushita; Ovitz was simply a member of a team, led by Sony's longtime adviser Peter Peterson, who is the chairman of the Blackstone Group, an investment-banking firm. Ovitz had been introduced to Norio Ohga, a former opera singer who is the president of Sony, by Walter Yetnikoff, then the head of Sony Records and an Ovitz client.

Yetnikoff had a long history with Sony. As an employee of CBS Records, he had dealt with Sony executives during the twenty-year joint venture of the two companies, and he was the head of CBS Records when Sony bought it, in November, 1987, for two billion dollars—at that time, the largest acquisition of an American company by a Japanese company. In the year after the purchase, moreover, Yetnikoff had produced strong profits for Sony, further solidifying his credibility. Friends of Yetnikoff's say that his dream was always to run a movie studio, and that at the moment of Sony's purchase of CBS Records he launched a campaign for it to buy a studio as well.

While Yetnikoff may have been an effective cheerleader for a studio acquisition, the acquisition's roots for Sony lay in the bruising battle that the company had fought in the late seventies against Matsushita over their competing videocassette-recorder formats. Initially, Matsushita's longer-playing VHS system, introduced after Sony's Betamax, had captured the market by underselling the Betamax. Then, with the rise of the prerecorded movie cassette, the VHS victory became self-sustaining: more video stores carried VHS cassettes than carried Betamax, because there were more VHS machines on the market; and because there were more VHS cassettes available more people bought VHS machines.

It was apparently this experience,



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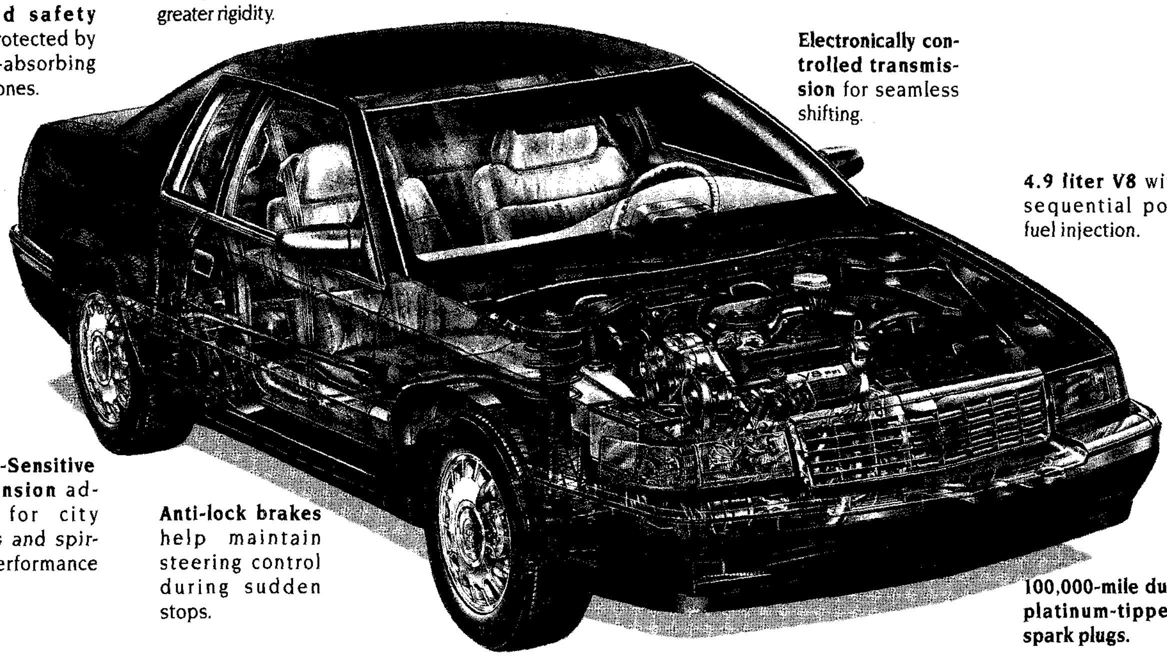


**Rugged safety cage** protected by energy-absorbing crush zones.

**All-new body structure** provides 40% greater rigidity.

**Electronically controlled transmission** for seamless shifting.

**4.9 liter V8** with sequential port fuel injection.

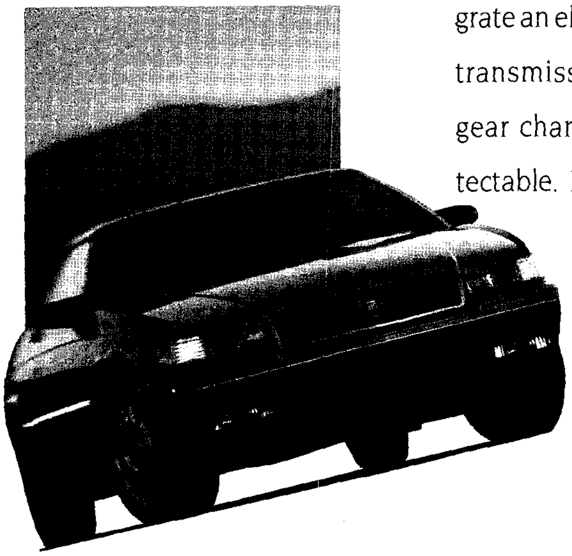
**Speed-Sensitive Suspension** adjusts for city streets and spirited performance roads.

**Anti-lock brakes** help maintain steering control during sudden stops.

**100,000-mile dual platinum-tipped spark plugs.**

## Strike a Balance.

Power, of course, is essential. The type that's both plentiful and spirited. Next, you integrate an electronically controlled transmission. One that makes gear changes practically undetectable. Even the wide, 16-inch Michelin touring tires are specially tuned to Eldorado's suspension. Eldorado possesses technology that works in harmony, to provide a total driving experience. Not to mention pure joy.



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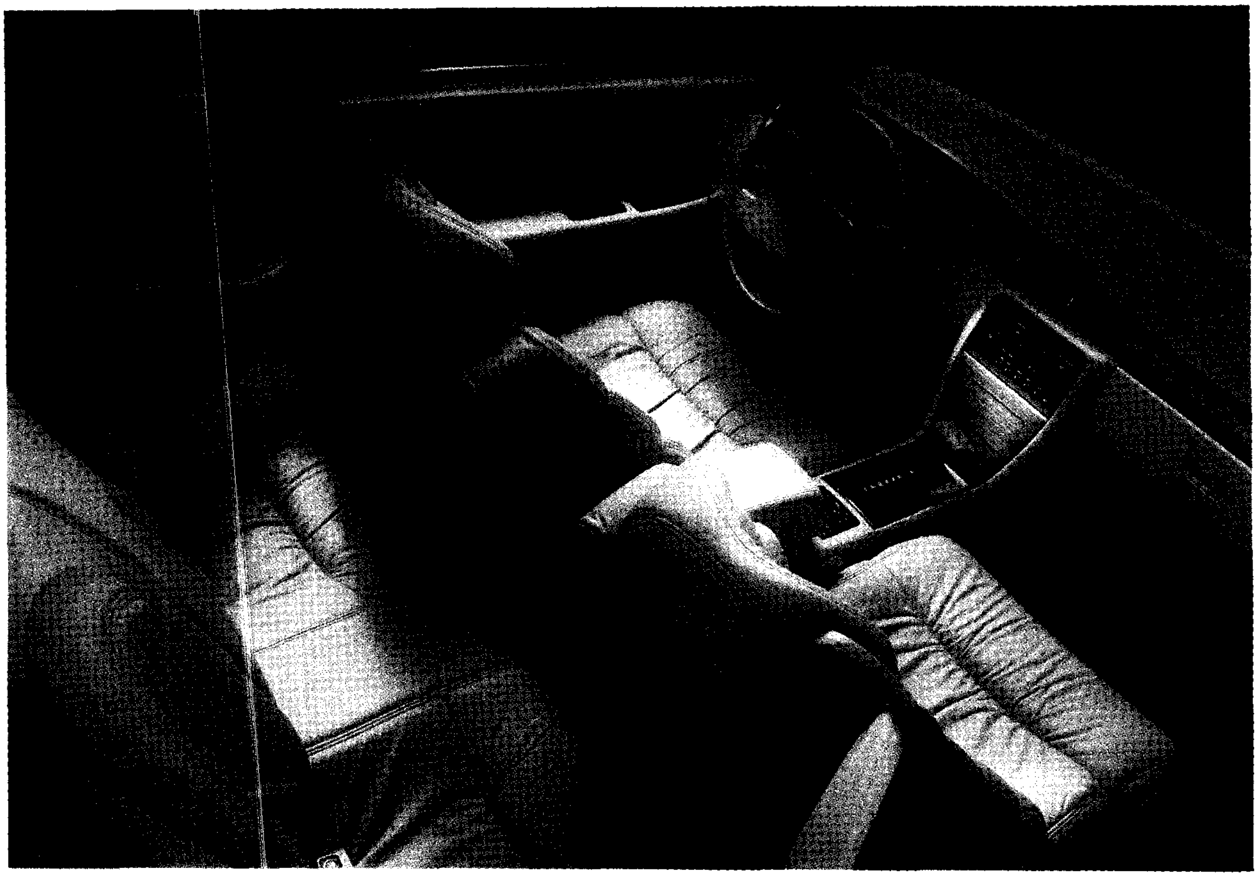


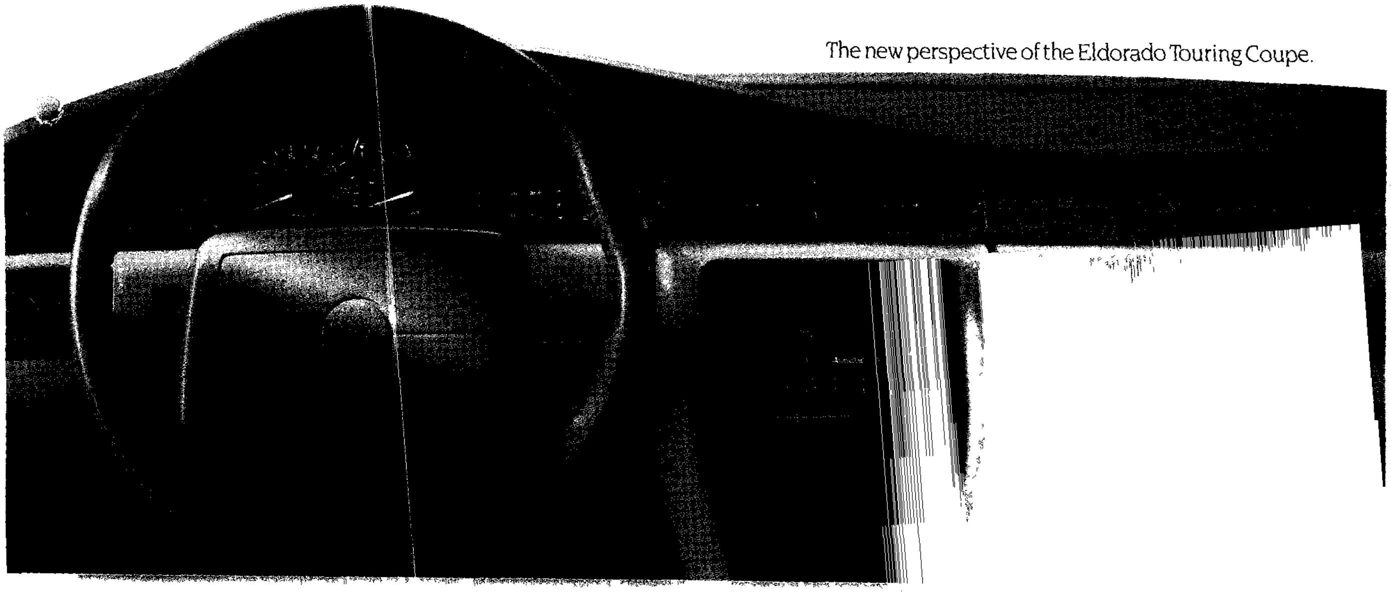
The handfitted leather seating areas of the Eldorado Touring Coupe.

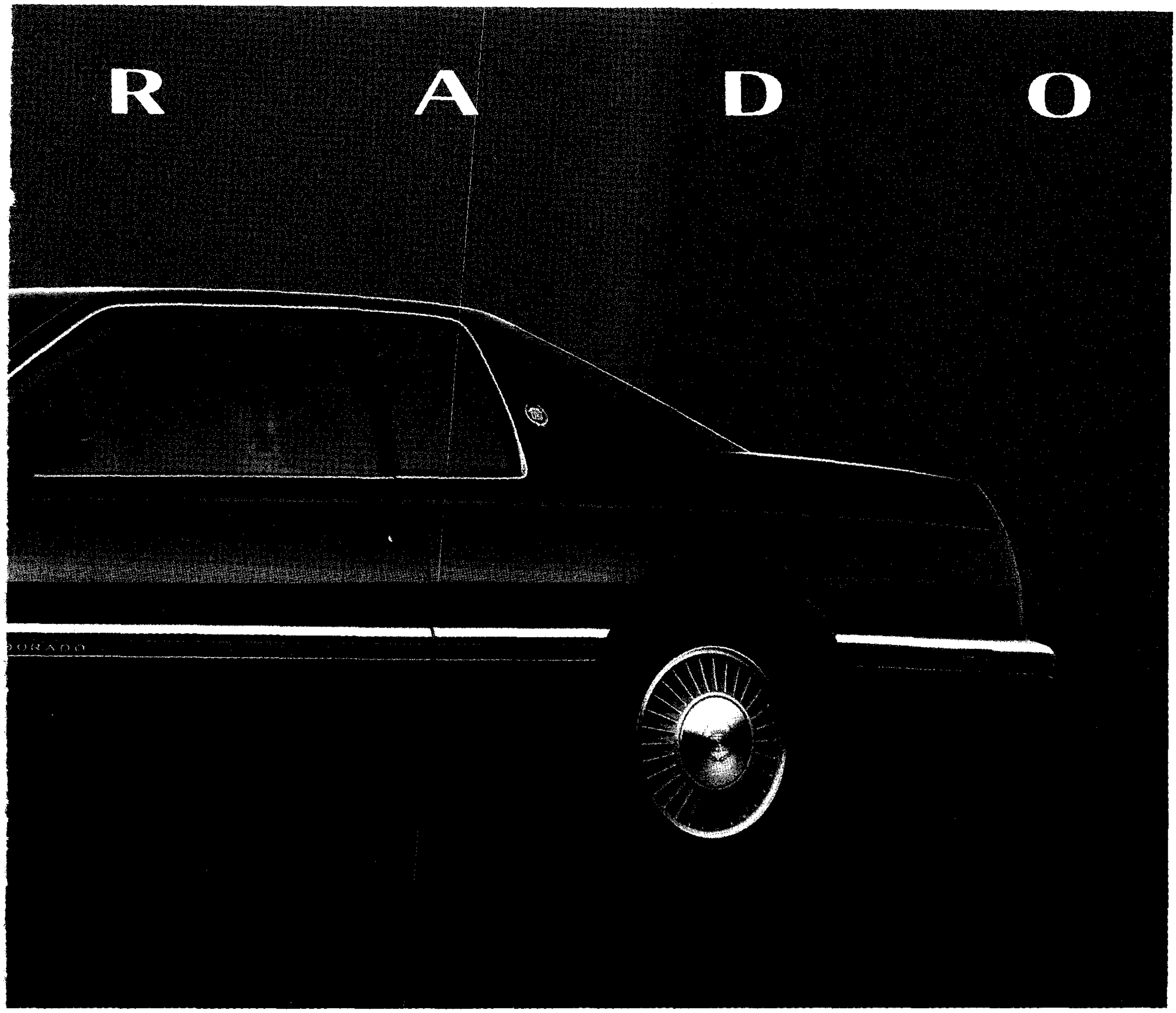
## A Refined Difference.

Refinement takes shape. It begins when you sit down. Immediately you notice how the seats seem to have been sculpted specifically to your dimensions. Optional premium leather seating areas soothe you. Patented lumbar supports are available to pinpoint individual comfort settings at the desired height and depth, thus reducing lower-back discomfort during long trips.

And no matter what driving situation you might encounter, you feel you will be held firmly in place. Surveying the instrument panel, you note how essential controls are thoughtfully placed to allow for an unobstructed view. Within arm's reach, a teardrop-shaped dash turns the horizon into a gentle slope. Openness and order are everywhere you look.

The new perspective of the Eldorado Touring Coupe.





**The 1992 Eldorado. Substance takes shape, Cadillac Style.**

## 1992 CADILLAC ELDORADO

Front-engine, front-wheel-drive coupe. 5-passenger, 2-door steel body.

### ENGINE:

4.9 liter V8, aluminum block, iron heads. Bore x stroke 3.62 x 3.62 in (92.0 x 92.0 mm). Compression ratio 9.5:1. Fuel system sequential port fuel injection. Power net 200 bhp @ 4100 rpm. Torque net 275- lb-ft @ 3000 rpm.

### DRIVETRAIN:

4-speed electronic automatic transmission. Final-drive ratio 2.97:1 Eldorado Touring Coupe: 3.33:1

### MEASUREMENTS:

Wheelbase 108.0 in. Track front/rear 60.9/60.9 in. Length x width x height 202.2 x 75.6 x 54.0 in. Curb weight 3604 lb. Coefficient of drag 0.33. Fuel capacity 18.8 gal. Luggage capacity 15.3 cu ft.

### SUSPENSION:

Independent front, with electronically controlled dampers, coil springs, anti-roll bar. Independent rear, with electronically controlled dampers, transverse leaf spring, anti-roll bar.

### STEERING:

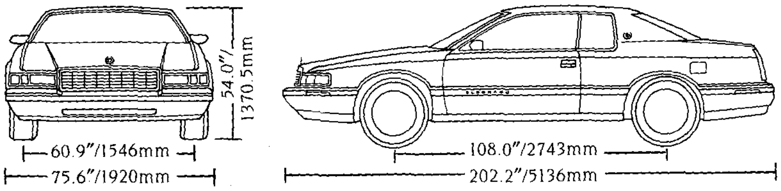
Rack-and-pinion, power-assisted. Turns lock to lock 2.8.

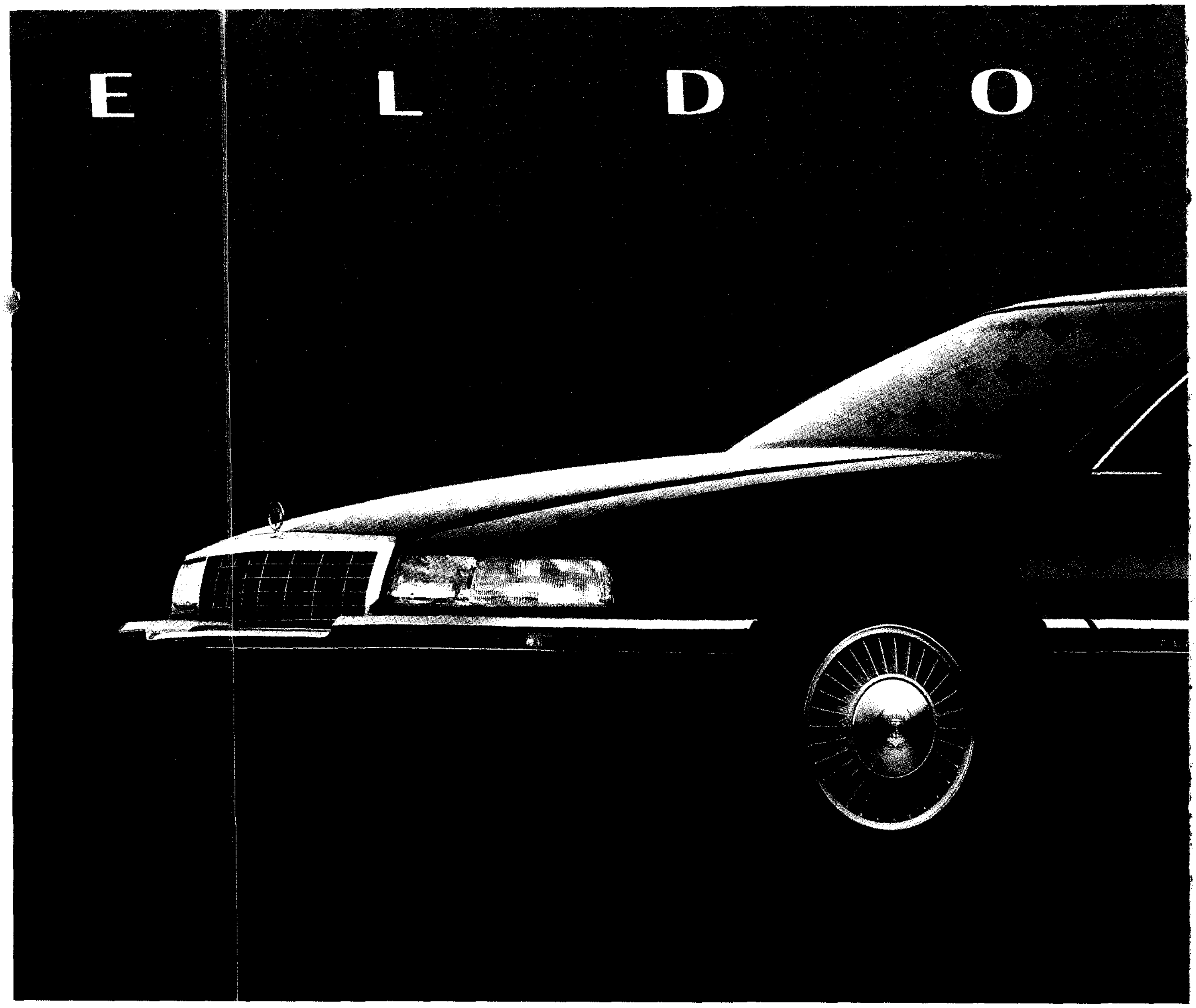
### BRAKES:

Power-assisted vented discs front, solid discs rear. Anti-lock system.

### WHEELS AND TIRES:

16 x 7.0-in forged aluminum wheels; 225/60R16 Michelin® XGT4 tires; Eldorado Touring Coupe: 225/60HR16 Goodyear® Eagle GA tires.





## A Systems Approach to Safety.

Safety takes shape with the philosophy Cadillac applies to automotive safety. The 199[illegible] Eldorado meets or exceeds the demanding requirements not only of the United States but Europe and Japan as well.

A rugged steel safety cage is designed to remain intact during a collision. The cage is bolstered front and rear by crush zones, which absorb energy impact to help protect the interior compartment. Side guard door beams not only resist side intrusion, they also helped the Eldorado successfully complete dynamic side-impact testing, even though this is not a government requirement until the 1997 model year for all car lines. Sensors with gold-plated internal contacts provide superior conductivity to activate the driver's-side Supplemental Inflatable Restraint System (air bag), which is to be used with the safety belt system.

This is the systems approach to safety at Cadillac. When designing a safer automobile, all systems work together to provide their greatest benefit–protecting you and your family.

## One Owner at a Time.

On-the-spot assistance from more participating dealers than any other roadside service program.

As the owner of a 1992 Eldorado, you're afforded considerable ownership privileges. Such as the assurance of a no-deductible, Gold Key Bumper to Bumper Warranty.*

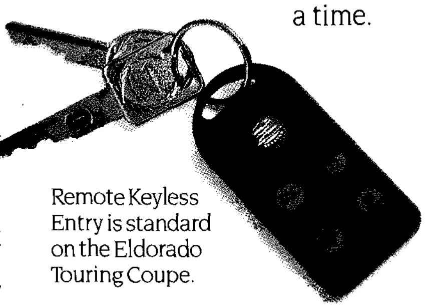
With it, every main component is covered. From engine to suspension. Comfort features to safety systems. For 4 years or 50,000 miles. That way, your driving pleasure is assured for years to come.

Additionally, you have the support of 24-hour Cadillac Roadside Service®, the most comprehensive program of its kind for all Cadillac owners.

Cadillac provides on-the-spot service when you need it the most–nights, weekends and holidays. If necessary, a highly trained service technician will be dispatched in a special vehicle that carries genuine GM parts, to get you back on the road with a minimum of inconvenience.

For 12 months/12,000 miles, it now offers complementary emergency road service, including free gasoline delivery, and trip-interruption reimbursement. And no-charge trip routing for 4 years/50,000 miles.

At Cadillac, substance takes shape. One owner at a time.



Remote Keyless Entry is standard on the Eldorado Touring Coupe.

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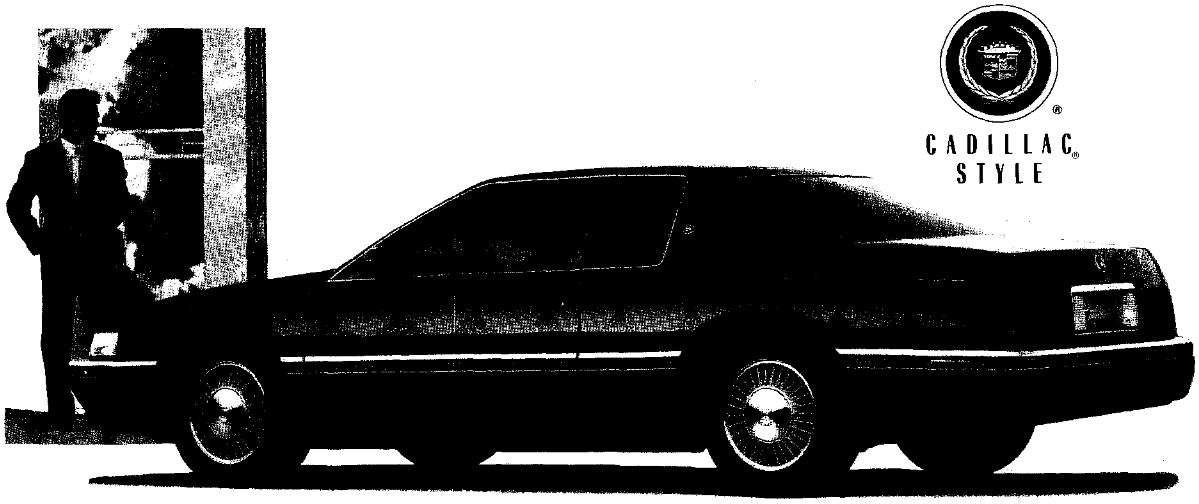

**The 1992 Eldorado. Substance takes shape, Cadillac Style.**

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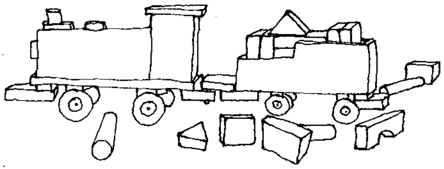
which in the early eighties had threatened Sony's very survival, that fired its appetite for software. "It was awful," a *Times* article in February, 1990, quoted Sony's deputy president, Ken Iwaki, as saying. "We learned that it is very difficult to introduce new hardware without software support. People buy machines for the software, not for the machines, not for the format." The preoccupation with software (what one adviser in the Matsushita-MCA transaction later referred to as "the Japanese *obsession* with the marriage of hardware and software") was accentuated in the mid- and late eighties—for Matsushita as well as for Sony—by the ongoing development of a number of new formats, among them the digital-audiotape (DAT) recorder, the 8-mm. Video Walkman, and, most important, high-definition television, or HDTV.

Designed to reproduce images that rival those in movie theatres, HDTV is an all-inclusive technology, running the gamut from television to cameras, editing machines, and electronics for creating special effects. Many people believe that HDTV will be a signal phenomenon of the nineties—that just as Americans replaced their black-and-white television sets with color sets in the sixties and seventies they will replace their color sets with HDTVs in this decade. And Japanese, European, and American companies (including Zenith, the sole surviving American-owned television manufacturer) are currently engaged in a high-stakes contest, each attempting to prevail upon the Federal Communications Commission to adopt its own HDTV standard for the American market.

Important though HDTV is, the Japanese appetite for software probably cannot be wholly linked to any one format. The appetite seems to spring, rather, from an appreciation of the strength and the worldwide appeal of the American entertainment industry: it is this country's second-largest net exporter, after the aerospace industry, and its products—movies, music, television programming, and home video—account for an annual trade surplus of some eight billion dollars. This rapidly changing high-tech landscape, in which computer, audio, and video technologies have already begun to merge, will clearly set the tone for the twenty-first century. As the journalist Neil Gross has written in *Business Week*, Sony and Matsushita "will control both the medium and the message in what the Japanese call the New Information Age."

Ovitz, who had been fascinated by the prospect of a nexus between the worlds of high tech and entertainment even before he was hired by Sony, attempted in his role as its scout to lead Sony to MCA. Other Sony advisers felt that MCA had been living on its legend in the last fifteen years or so—having missed opportunities in cable and having blundered badly with its toy unit, LJN, and its forty-nine-per-cent-owned Cineplex Odeon theatre chain—and that its value was not nearly the roughly eight billion dollars that Wasserman and its board then thought it was. Ovitz, however, was adamant. "Mike was in love with MCA," one of the advisers recalled. "He said, 'You have got to be able to see the potential. It has this great film library. It has mystique and magic. Wasserman is like royalty in Los Angeles—you don't understand what that kind of clout and prestige is worth. And you can resuscitate the company.' "

Sony, however, decided on Columbia, and went about acquiring it in a way that, in retrospect, appears maladroit. In addition to receiving negative publicity from congressional hearings, Sony is generally thought to have overpaid badly for Columbia; one participant in both the Sony and the Matsushita deals has calculated that if Matsushita had paid the multiples that Sony did, it would have paid at least sixty per cent more per share than it actually wound up paying. Probably the worst aspect of the deal from Sony's standpoint was the negotiations it undertook to free its chosen management team, Jon Peters and Peter Guber, from a contract with Warner Brothers; according to some insiders' estimates of the value of the concessions it made to Warner, Sony in essence spent roughly eight hundred million dollars to attain the two producers' services. By the time the Guber-Peters episode got under way, however, Ovitz had withdrawn from the scene.



Ovitz had been Sony's choice to run Columbia. He had greatly impressed many of the people who dealt with him in the course of the negotiations for Columbia—Michael Schulhof, the vice-chairman of Sony USA, and the bankers from Blackstone among them. Referring to Ovitz's conversations with the Sony executives and advisers about his running Columbia, one person told me, "In his world—Hollywood—he believes they're all dumb and he's smart. He views himself as a studio executive in exile. He understands the creative process and they don't. He controls the talent, so he's more powerful than the studio heads. And, because he's smart and they're dumb, he can see how the different parts of a project go together. He will know that Dustin Hoffman should be cast with Tom Cruise in this script over here. He will know that it is a movie that should be made. He will know how much should be spent on advertising and promotion. He will know how many theatres it should open in. He is the master, and the rest of these guys are schlubs. He said that M-G-M had this movie coming out—that it should be No. 1 but it would be No. 2 or 3. 'These guys are so hopelessly dumb,' he said. 'They are cutting back on the number of theatres it will open in. I screamed at them. I fixed it a little bit. So it will be No. 2 or 3—but it should have been No. 1.' " That movie was "Rain Man," and when it became a blockbuster the Sony team was awestruck. Sony's lawyers worked for a month on its offer to Ovitz; in the papers that were being drawn up, his code name was Superman. Ultimately, Sony proposed a deal in which Ovitz would run Columbia Pictures, and CAA would be bought out (thereby enabling Ovitz to cash out his majority share) and then sold back on favorable terms to CAA agents; this transaction would reportedly have given Ovitz about a hundred million dollars.

Ovitz, several people say, countered with a proposal of his own, which he had prepared with the assistance of Robert Greenhill, of the investment-banking firm of Morgan Stanley. His proposal called for him to be the head not only of Columbia Pictures but also of the record division—the pinnacle of Sony's United States entertainment empire—with a corporate structure that, because he would control a preponder-

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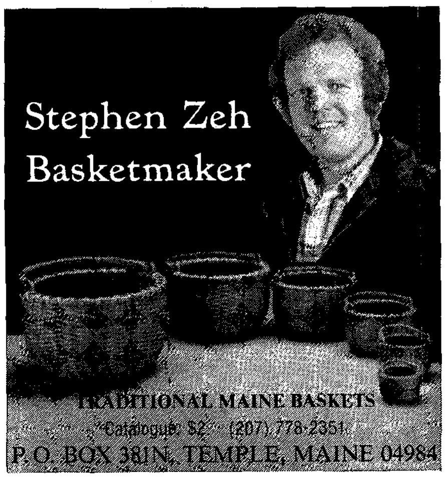
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ance of the board members, would give him near-autonomy; and this package was said to have a worth of something close to two hundred million dollars. After a brief consultation with its advisers, Sony rejected his proposal. (Ovitz told friends in Hollywood that it was he who, after some consideration, had rejected Sony, and press accounts have, typically, repeated his version of events.)

WHEN Ovitz introduced Matsushita's executive vice-president and director, Masahiko Hirata, to MCA's president, Sidney Sheinberg, at the evening at Wasserman's home in early October, Sheinberg—a lanky Texan, whose diction hints at his native state, and who is a notoriously outspoken, volatile, often acerbic man whose personality appears, to some, a business handicap—remarked to Hirata, "You probably don't know this, but I am responsible, in part, for your VHS system's having become as successful as it did." Sheinberg, who used to be the president of MCA's Universal Pictures, then explained that he had been the progenitor of a lawsuit (he often referred to it, in fact, as "my personal lawsuit") that Universal and Walt Disney Productions filed against Sony in 1976, in which they sought to block Sony's sales of the Betamax, arguing that the machines, which were used to record movies and programs from television sets, violated copyright law. Ultimately, Universal and Disney lost that battle in the United States Supreme Court, in 1984, and the litigation appears to have been not only quixotic but—insofar as it was prompted by a fear that the VCR would hurt the entertainment industry—wrongheaded. One ancillary effect that the lawsuit had, in any event, was to make it more difficult for Sony to license, for prerecorded cassettes, movies from most major Hollywood studios. This slowing of Sony, Sheinberg claimed, worked to the advantage of VHS, the late starter.

After Sheinberg finished describing his inadvertent contribution to Matsushita in the fierce Betamax-VHS battle—a battle that had been crucial to Hirata, who was heavily involved in the development of the VHS—Hirata responded by shaking his hand and saying, simply, "Thank you."

Sheinberg's gambit may have struck the Matsushita executives as somewhat immodest or strained, but Ovitz, in carefully laying the groundwork for this meeting, had surely warned them to expect a strong, assertive personality. Indeed, it was apparently Ovitz's concern about the chemistry between his Japanese clients and the two MCA executives—especially Sheinberg—that was a reason he had wanted to limit their contact to this one social evening.

Ovitz had found certain passages in Edwin O. Reischauer's 1988 book "The Japanese Today" particularly relevant in thinking about the transaction. In one passage Reischauer describes the difference between Western and Japanese personality types. The Japanese type is "at least superficially smooth, affable, mild, and formally correct," he writes. "Westerners seem to them by contrast a little rough, unpredictable, and immature in their frankness and ready display of emotions. In the West unpredictability in a person may be seen as amusing or spirited, but to the Japanese it is a particularly reprehensible trait." For his CAA team on this deal, Ovitz had taken care to choose those with reliably even temperaments. And he warned them before the final negotiations that he expected no raised voices, at any time—they must all be in total control of their emotions. At that time, too, he cautioned Sheinberg that a single outburst from him could destroy the deal. One person involved in the transaction said, "There were egos to be handled here—and there was nothing to be gained by putting them together, except for that one time. There's no rushing Matsushita Electric Industrial—no rushing a company that is that old and that rich. And there's no telling Lew and Sid how to run their company. You want to control the two sides, control how you put them together—you have to immerse them slowly in the bathwater. It's like sculpting—you need a base to work from, then you can knead and play with it. But if it is thrown together too quickly it could have an ugly face."

Ovitz had been at work on this deal for nearly a year before the parties met at Wasserman's home, and he had focussed on Matsushita even earlier. In the summer of 1989, Sandy Kliman, a Harvard Business School graduate hired by Ovitz to help CAA expand into the area of corporate representation, had helped prepare a memo on the top ten Japanese companies considered potential acquirers in the entertainment industry, and had presented Matsushita—particularly in the light of the coming Sony-Columbia transaction—as a prime candidate. Ovitz and his associates noted that, while Matsushita was a traditional, conservative hardware company, its ninety-four-year-old patriarch, Konosuke Matsushita, had died that April, and they reasoned that the company might be particularly susceptible to innovation.

Moreover, in August, 1989—shortly before the Sony-Columbia deal was consummated—JVC, a fifty-one-percent-owned subsidiary of Matsushita, which had served as its parent's window on the world of software, announced a hundred-million-dollar annual investment in Largo, a production company headed by the veteran Hollywood producer Lawrence Gordon. Now JVC representatives were invited to CAA to discuss their company and, especially, its parent; the representatives talked at length about the philosophy of Konosuke Matsushita, and later sent Ovitz one of his books.

In November, JVC employees told Ovitz that executives from Matsushita, including Hirata, wished to meet him. Ovitz checked Hirata's position in the organization and was excited to discover that he was the head of financial matters for the company, and one of its most senior officers; Ovitz interpreted Hirata's interest as an indication of the importance that Matsushita must attach to the meeting, since he knew that the Japanese would typically send mid-level people to begin an exploration. He prepared for the meeting as if for an exam. He read several of Konosuke Matsushita's books—noting the central themes of a company that is run by consensus and dedicated to the ultimate goal of creating a better society—and concluded that he could see similarities between Matsushita's company and his own.

The meeting, held in Hawaii in the last week of November, went well. (Japan was considered too risky a site, since in the aftermath of the Sony-Columbia transaction the Japanese press was attempting to dog every move of the top Matsushita executives.) The Matsushita executives had also come prepared: Hirata seemed to know a great deal about Ovitz. Ovitz recalls that much of the two days they spent together was devoted to social interaction. "We didn't talk about the trans-

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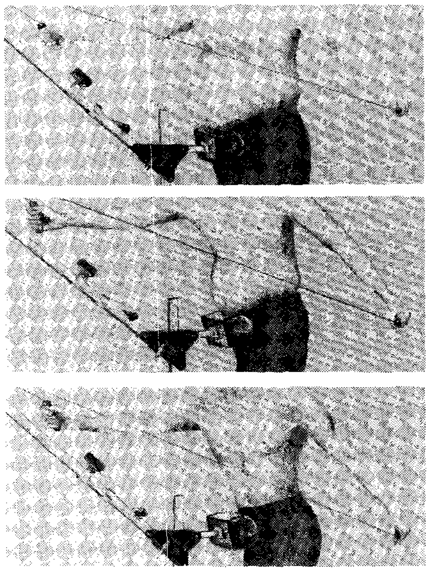

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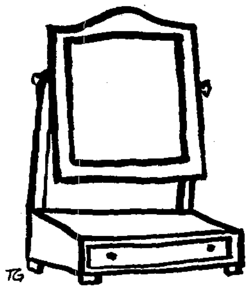
action," he says. "We talked about life, about their company, about ours. We talked about martial arts. We talked about stereo equipment. We talked about our children. We talked about art, music. We got to know each other better."

At the end of the meeting, when the Matsushita executives asked what kind of contract Ovitz would want as their consultant, he is said to have replied that he did not need one; they would work together, and if they found what he did satisfactory they would discuss what was appropriate. Ovitz had decided that this was the proper approach: to proceed on a handshake basis, and to build a relationship. He knew, too, that this would provide a marked contrast to the investment bankers who were bombarding Matsushita with proposals and fee letters, and whom the Matsushita executives did not trust. (Ovitz had not asked for a contract with Sony, either, and he is said to have been paid ten million dollars in the end for what was a not very pivotal role.) An issue that Ovitz did want to resolve, however, was the leadership of any transaction that Matsushita would undertake. The Matsushita executives, who had studied the Sony transaction "under a microscope," as one participant in the meeting expressed it, asked whether it was Sony or its American advisers who had created the problems in that transaction, and Ovitz is said to have responded that in his view it had been the advisers—that there had been too many chefs in the kitchen. If Matsushita was to avoid the pitfalls of Sony, he reportedly told them, he would have to run the deal.



In sessions in Osaka, and also in Los Angeles, with a team sent from Matsushita, Ovitz and his associates at CAA led a process of familiarizing Matsushita with the entertainment industry. They started with a complete overview, encompassing motion pictures, television, broadcasting, music, books, real estate, theme parks, movie theatres, sports, comic books, and toys, and then began concentrating on motion pictures, television, and music. One participant told me afterward, "You can't be a good consultant except by beginning with the broadest parameters. How can you understand the *planet without the universe?*" The CAA team members found that their Matsushita students were voracious gatherers of information, asking thousands of questions. "They were like sponges," one said. In the sessions, there was always a Matsushita employee taking notes (Ovitz did not allow taping), and whenever something appeared inconsistent with the information imparted in an earlier session the appointed scribe would say, "But that does not correspond with what you said" and would specify the date and time. "At one point, we had mentioned four hundred and twenty acres owned by MCA in California, and then, during the due diligence"—a process by which a prospective acquirer seeks to ascertain the value of the assets to be purchased—"we found there were four hundred and fourteen," one participant told me. "They said, 'Where are they?' You can't be humorous with them, and say, 'Oh, give or take six acres.' They would suspect that someone had sold it out from under them."

Under CAA's tutelage, Matsushita considered as candidates three companies—Orion, Paramount, and MCA. Of the three, MCA was the clear choice. Orion was comparatively small and weak, and Paramount was not in the business of music or theme parks, which was important to Matsushita. MCA could offer Matsushita an entertainment empire with interests in motion pictures, television, music, theme parks, and movie theatres, and also (more tangential for Matsushita) book publishing and real estate; MCA's film library, moreover—crucial to Matsushita's appetite for software—was one of Hollywood's largest and most valuable. And it seems plain that although MCA did not come into focus as a target until May, 1990, when Ovitz made a four-hour presentation in Osaka, in Ovitz's design the target was destined to be MCA from the start.

ACCORDING to Sheinberg, Ovitz began talking to him in early 1990 about the possibility of his having a buyer for MCA. While Ovitz subsequently had conversations with Wasserman before making his formal approach to him that September, it was Sheinberg, according to several people involved in the transaction, whom he courted most attentively. As close observers of MCA were well aware—and there was no more avid MCA-watcher than Ovitz—"management" had been one of the obstacles to MCA's being acquired or effecting a merger in the recent past. The issue of who will rule is predictably difficult in any merger; here, with the controversial Sheinberg, it was compounded.

From the mid-eighties on, Wasserman had had discussions with executives of Disney, before its current management took over; with RCA, before it was acquired by General Electric; and, more recently, with Capital Cities/ABC. In the summer of 1990, Wasserman's talks with Paramount Communications would founder, too—on the issue of Sheinberg.

MCA was a public company, but it had so much the ethos of a family business that some who were close to it referred to it at times as Wasserman & Son. It had been founded, in Chicago, in 1924, by Dr. Jules Stein, a practicing ophthalmologist, who had the idea that, with the growth of radio and its effect on the popularity of bands, it might be possible for bands to travel, much as vaudeville acts did, through a circuit of theatres; the Music Corporation of America started as an agency that booked travelling bands. In 1937, it opened a Hollywood office to represent artists in the motion-picture industry; three years later, Wasserman took charge of that office, and it soon became the engine of the company; and in 1946 Stein named Wasserman, then thirty-three, the company president. Under Wasserman's aegis, MCA eventually expanded from the agency business into producing and distributing television films as well (because of its ubiquity, it became known in Hollywood as the Octopus), but in 1962, after the United States Justice Department filed an antitrust action against MCA, Wasserman was forced to choose between the two businesses, and the agency business was dissolved as part of a consent decree. Stein remained as MCA's chairman until 1973. Then Wasserman, who had been president, succeeded him, and Sheinberg became president.

MCA had become a public company in 1959. According to many who have known Wasserman over the years, a hallmark of his has been a concern for

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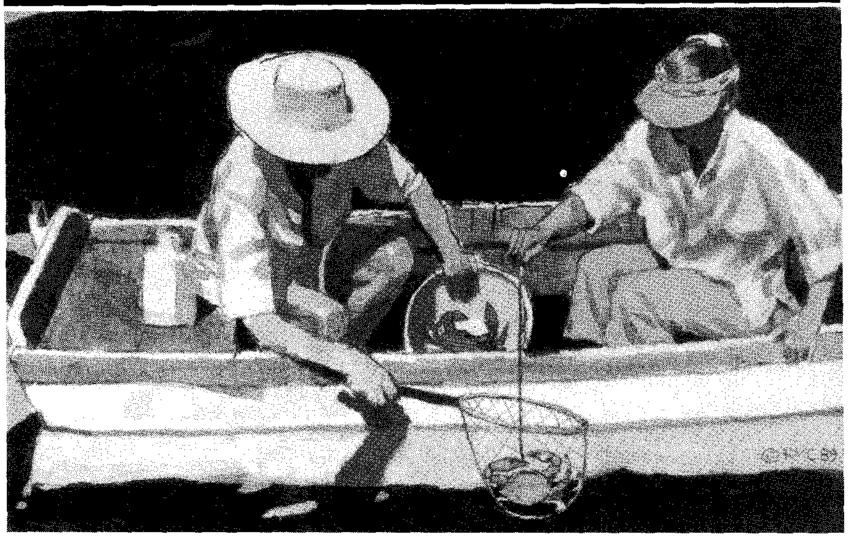

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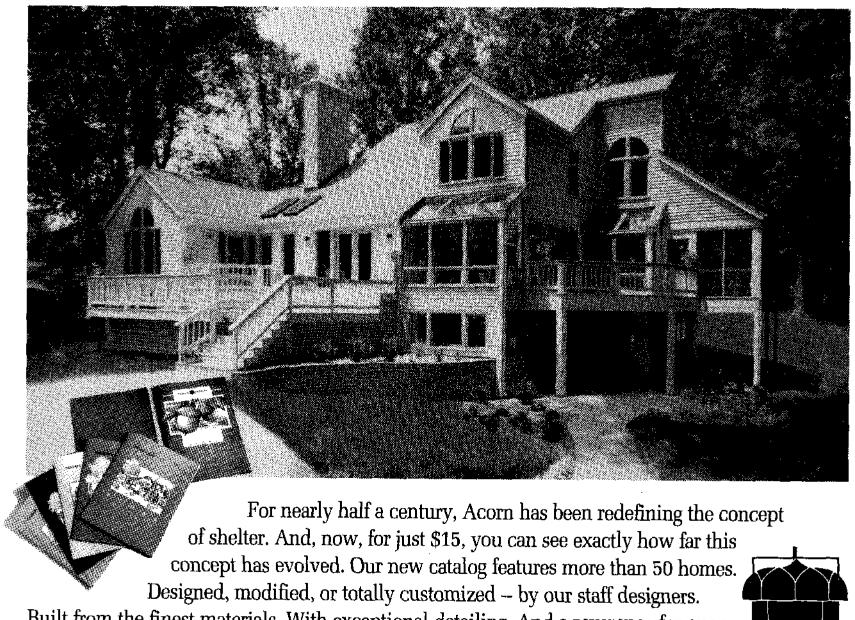

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MCA shareholders. ("All the clichés are actually true," Sheinberg says.) When I asked Wasserman about his often expressed concern, he told me he thought that it came from the company's having been closely held for so long—that what had originated as a proprietary feeling had evolved, over time, into one that extended to the public. "There was only one shareholder, Jules Stein, until 1954," Wasserman said. "In 1953, he walked into my office and said he'd decided to spin off some of the stock to the executives. There was no negotiation. He said, 'I'm going to keep forty per cent. You're going to have twenty per cent. Decide who gets the rest.' That was the entire conversation. So in the early days, and then for many years, the stock was mainly owned by internal management."

Despite the fact that MCA's stock had come to be held largely in public hands (according to the *Wall Street Journal*, around the time of the transaction Wasserman owned about seven per cent and, with other officers, had voting control over an additional 11.6 per cent), Wasserman seemed to feel that the company was Stein's legacy to him. He told me that on the night he decided to do the Matsushita deal he thought a great deal about Stein, and decided that Stein, who had been very public-spirited, would have liked the deal, because of the kind of company Matsushita was and the kind of man its founder had been.

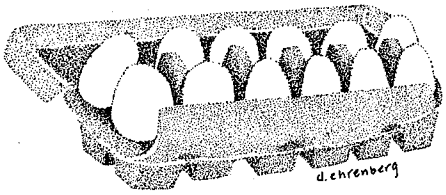
Just as Stein had in some sense bequeathed the company to him, by making Wasserman a trustee of the Jules Stein estate, in order that the stock could be controlled, so had Wasserman, back in 1973, designated Sheinberg, by making him a co-executor of the Wasserman estate. According to associates of Wasserman and Sheinberg, however, their relationship is complex and is largely opaque—even, perhaps, to the men themselves. One who knows them well told me, "Unless one of them has an outside engagement, they have had lunch together almost every workday for nineteen years. Their wives are cool toward each other. I have no idea whether on any human level the two men like each other. No one will ever know, because they don't talk about it. But I know they respect each other."

Lew Wasserman is generally viewed in Hollywood as one of the industry's titans, possessed of indomitable drive, great political skill, and a daunting mental acuity. The culture that grew up around him at MCA tended to mirror some of his traits: it was notably tough, arrogant, and inflexible. ("If MCA isn't God, nobody in the company knows it" was a Hollywood saying quoted in a *Fortune* article in 1960.) One friend of Sheinberg's says he believes that Sheinberg, who is fifty-six, has carried a perpetual burden from the moment Wasserman anointed him his successor: "I see Sid as someone who has wanted to please his father so much, and who must know that he never, never can." Indeed, Sheinberg, who took no vacation for several years in the seventies, because he was trying so hard to emulate Wasserman, told me, "There is only one Lew Wasserman. Anyone who tries to measure up to him is destined to failure—as I, for one, can certainly tell you."

Whatever may be the private strains between the two men, Wasserman's loyalty to Sheinberg has been unwavering. He has apparently been unfazed by others' criticism of Sheinberg, and it became abundantly clear in recent years that Wasserman would countenance no deal that injured him.

For Sheinberg, however, the status quo could not be preserved for long. Inasmuch as the company was not Wasserman & Son in reality, he was only its symbolic heir; if Wasserman died, the company would be put into play, and Sheinberg would be unlikely to survive. Moreover, since the Time-Warner merger both Wasserman and Sheinberg had become convinced that MCA needed greater size and more financial power in the increasingly agglomerated and global world of media-entertainment companies. Consequently, the Matsushita deal represented the best of all possible worlds for Sheinberg: he would be both cashed out of his substantial stock position and—if the Matsushita executives meant what they said—assured of continuing to run MCA.

Thus Sheinberg—an impediment in earlier deals—became the critical facilitator of this one. Ovitz made him an ally from the start. "At the beginning, Michael wanted to know whether it would be possible to make a deal, what would be important, how we would go about it," Sheinberg told me. "He indicated that he was representing a Japanese company, but he did not name it." Sheinberg added that from the start he had believed it to be Matsushita. "I told him I thought a deal was possible, assuming it was one we believed was in the best interests of the employees and the shareholders. I felt that a straightforward approach was the best one, that it was really not mysterious. He said, 'But I want to be sure that I do the right thing.' He wanted, I think, to be sure he didn't turn left when he should have turned right—especially with regard to Lew Wasserman."



For decades, Wasserman had assumed the role of paterfamilias of the industry—its arbiter within and its guardian without, and a speaker who was heeded in Washington on national issues as well. As it became increasingly clear that MCA was searching for either a partner or an acquirer, and that Japanese companies were eagerly prospecting in the entertainment industry, the conventional wisdom in Hollywood was that Wasserman would not sell to the Japanese, because he saw the industry as a national asset, whose control and profits, especially at a time of declining United States competitiveness, ought not to be surrendered to foreign hands.

Through the spring and early summer of 1990, while Ovitz was continuing to ready Sheinberg for the transaction, Wasserman—apprised of Ovitz's intentions—was investigating at least one other avenue. He had extensive conversations with Martin Davis, the chairman and C.E.O. of Paramount Communications. What Wasserman and Davis contemplated was a stock-for-stock merger of the two companies. According to several knowledgeable people, these discussions advanced on the basis of Davis's assumption that Sheinberg would leave (it was being suggested in Hollywood gossip columns at the time that Sheinberg was tired of running a huge company and might want to be an independent producer) and control of the company would be divided between Wasserman and Davis. Then, it is said, in the early summer, just as lawyers and investment bankers were about to be summoned to begin the process of negotiation, Wasserman informed Davis that Sheinberg would have to be Davis's co-C.E.O. That ended the discussions.

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BY the summer of 1990, Ovitz had begun to hold auditions for his team. He moved, as always, with stealth. Sheinberg commented, "I accused him once of thinking he is a member of Mossad"—the Israeli foreign-intelligence service. "He likes to do things with an aura of mystery." In the previous months, Ovitz had guarded the secret of his representation of Matsushita by, among other subterfuges, entrusting it to only a handful of people at CAA; insisting that memos be handwritten, so as not to be committed to computer disks; allowing only his longtime assistant to buy gifts for the Matsushita executives; flying to Osaka from San Francisco rather than from Los Angeles; staying up all night in Osaka to make his calls, so that no one would guess he was in Japan; instructing the Japanese to refer to him only by his code name, Mr. Nelson; and telling his own secretary he was in London when he was in Osaka.

Ovitz packaged his team for this deal as he had packaged teams for his movie deals over so many years. He wanted people who were highly capable, of course, but in this instance he also put a premium on their being even-tempered, discreet, and willing to take his direction; he certainly wanted no grandstanders. There was to be "no pride of ownership," one CAA man stressed. And as Ovitz began to select the key members he informed them that he insisted upon vetting every person that they brought in to work on the transaction; he wanted no short-term players, no young associates of a law firm or an investment bank who might be at a different firm a year hence and inclined to tell war stories.

One person who was auditioned for the team recalled how his interview with Ovitz was arranged, through an intermediary. Without revealing where they would be going or whom they were meeting, the intermediary directed this person to meet him at a street corner in Manhattan. Once there, he informed him that they were going to meet someone named Michael Ovitz, who was extremely secretive and had forbidden him to divulge any information. They then proceeded to an empty hotel suite and waited. Ovitz appeared. "We had a forty-five-minute meeting," this person recalled. "He talked about long-term relationships—mentioned that he'd been married twenty-one years to a wife whom he still loved very much. He asked me about my company. It had been a long time since anyone asked me to walk through my personal background, but I did it. Finally, he asked if I had any questions. I said, 'Yes, I could begin with the letter "A," but I gather this is not the time.' "

Ultimately, Ovitz, on behalf of Matsushita, hired lawyers from Simpson, Thacher & Bartlett; investment bankers from Allen & Company; and public-relations specialists from Adams & Rinehart. (CAA also had its own press-relations expert in this transaction—Stephen Rivers, whom Ovitz had hired in the wake of the Eszterhas furor.) He did not hire Morgan Stanley, much to the surprise of Robert Greenhill, the head of the firm's mergers-and-acquisitions (M. & A.) department, who had been Ovitz's personal adviser in his failed proposal to Sony in the summer of 1989. During that summer, Morgan Stanley had been advising Paramount in its bid to break up the Time-Warner merger and win Time, Inc. According to one person, Ovitz had watched that contest with great interest, and had bombarded Greenhill with questions about it, and about the M. & A. business generally, over the ensuing year.

Greenhill, this person says, tutored Ovitz in "M. & A. 101"—always with the expectation that it would lead to being hired in whatever transaction Ovitz might finally come up with. This person also claims that Greenhill received assurances from Ovitz, as the Matsushita bid for MCA became clear, that Morgan Stanley would be hired—and that the assurances continued after the Allen firm was hired (with the understanding that there would be two investment-banking firms), and even until mid-November, when the final negotiations began.

While Greenhill may have felt ill-used, he was by no means the only source that Ovitz tapped as he schooled himself for the transaction. Indeed, people who have been the target of an Ovitz information-gathering blitz describe him in much the same way that people from CAA described their Japanese clients—as asking countless questions, as "spongelike" in the capacity for soaking up information. While Ovitz was having dialogues with Greenhill, he was having similar ones with Herbert Allen, the president and C.E.O. of Allen & Company, who is a fixture in Hollywood deals,

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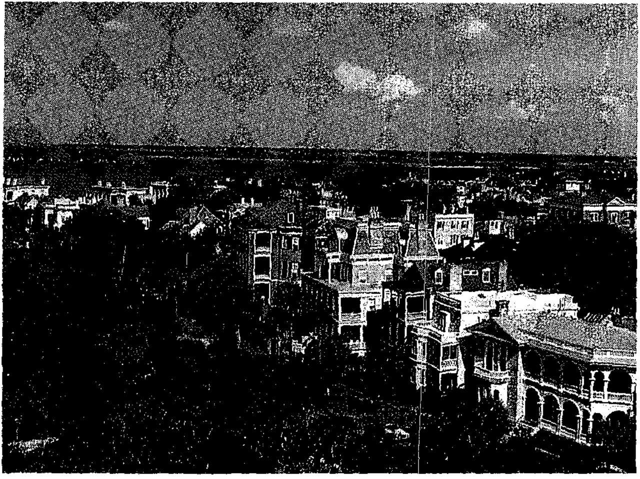

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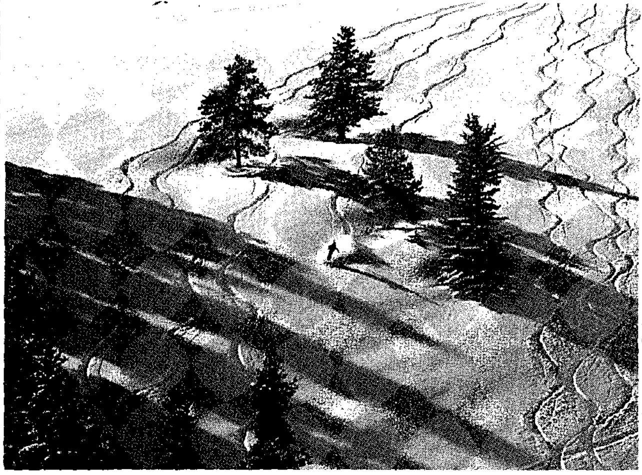

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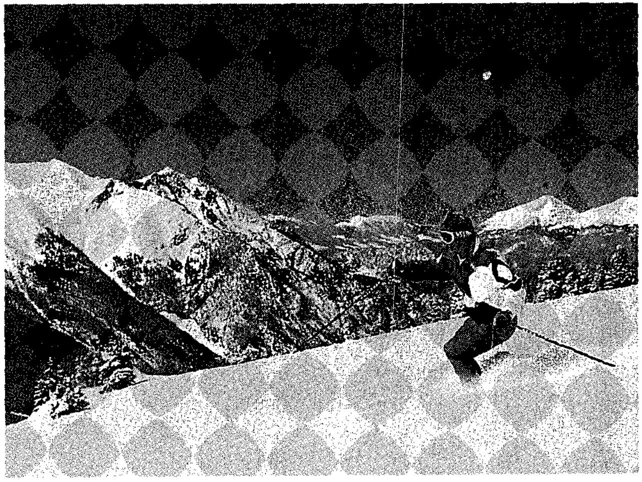

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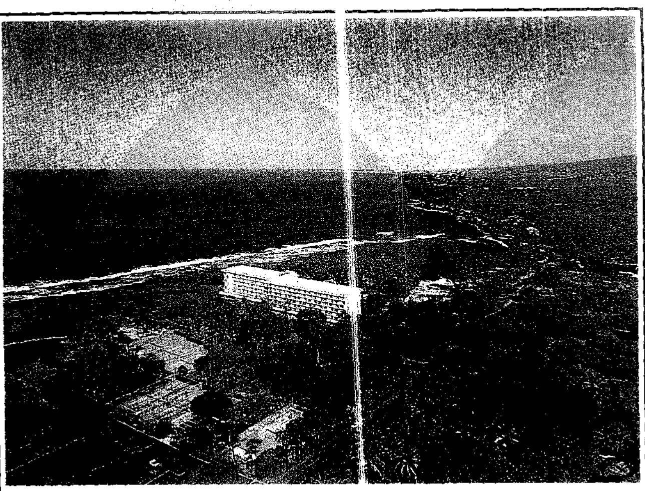

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and whom Ovitz had been cultivating for years.

Ovitz's friend Alfred Checchi, a notably astute financier, also provided help. Checchi had earlier told me of an experience he'd had in accompanying Ovitz to buy a telescope: he had become weary while Ovitz peppered the salesman with "one thousand questions—he wanted to know everything about telescopes." Now Checchi said, with a grin, of the questions Ovitz had asked him about finance in relation to this deal, "It was like the telescope. But whatever he needed he got. You want to help him."

The only member of the Matsushita team who was not handpicked by Ovitz (though he was approved by him) was Robert Strauss, the Washington, D.C., lawyer and power broker (now our Ambassador to the Soviet Union). A friend of Wasserman's since the sixties and an MCA director, Strauss had first met Keiya Toyonaga, the senior managing director of Matsushita, at a summit meeting in London in 1977; Strauss was there as a United States Special Trade Representative, and Toyonaga was representing Japan's Ministry of International Trade and Industry.

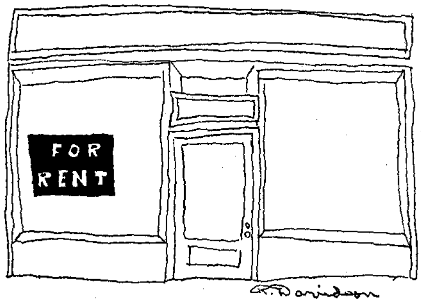
In recent years, Strauss's law firm, Akin, Gump, Strauss, Hauer & Feld, in Washington, has done work—most notably lobbying—for Matsushita. According to Strauss, Toyonaga called him in September, 1990, and—aware that he was an MCA board member and that his firm acted as counsel to MCA—proposed that MCA and Matsushita waive his conflict of interest, and that Strauss, in effect, represent both sides in the transaction. Wasserman agreed to the proposal, and Strauss assumed the role, probably unprecedented, of "counsellor to the transaction."

Although the joint letter of representation that MCA and Matsushita subsequently filed with the Securities and Exchange Commission presents Strauss and his associates as coördinating "certain government-relations matters" for the transaction, and explicitly excludes their participation in its negotiation, it seems unlikely that any of the parties involved intended Strauss's role to be so circumscribed. "The advantage I had was that I knew practically every individual involved—better than many of them knew each other," Strauss told me, and he pointed especially to his closeness to Herbert Allen and Wasserman and his friendship with Toyonaga. "This was a high-risk proposition, representing both sides in this deal. It was dangerous. But that's why I liked it. It got me all charged up."

IN late August, Ovitz called Felix Rohatyn, of Lazard Frères, MCA's longtime investment banker, to express formally Matsushita's interest in MCA. Rohatyn was one of those active members of New York's business, political, or artistic circles to whom Morton Janklow had begun introducing Ovitz several years earlier, when Ovitz decided that he wanted to broaden his horizons beyond Hollywood. Subsequently, Ovitz had sought Rohatyn's advice when he was exploring the possibility of establishing an overseas production company, in order to expand from the agency business into production, as Wasserman had done decades earlier; he wanted to be sure of circumnavigating the antitrust laws that Wasserman had run afoul of.

Over the next couple of weeks, Ovitz had a number of meetings with Sheinberg and Wasserman, at which he evaded any mention of what Matsushita might be willing to pay. Finally, on September 19th, at a meeting with Rohatyn and Sheinberg at Lazard Frères, he said that Matsushita was contemplating a price somewhere between seventy-five and ninety dollars per share.

On the basis of this price range—plus an understanding that Matsushita would proceed with a limited amount of inside information, and would work toward a contract providing virtually no outs (none, for example, for a war in the Persian Gulf)—MCA decided to go forward. The stock was then trading at only thirty-six dollars a share—the market had plunged after Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait, on August 2nd—but Rohatyn had warned Ovitz in their initial conversation that if Matsushita tried to take advantage of the weakness in the stock market it should be told that MCA would not negotiate on the basis of the present market values.



Perhaps thanks to Ovitz's mania for secrecy, no hint of the transaction had yet become public. But on September 25th a story in the *Wall Street Journal*, by Laura Landro and Richard Turner, reported the crucial elements of what was brewing between Matsushita and MCA, including a price ranging from eighty to ninety dollars a share, and cited as its source "individuals with knowledge of the talks."

Over the ensuing months, the identity of the primary source for this story was a point of sharp interest and debate among the participants in the deal. One magazine story, in February, 1991, which adhered in most respects to the chronology of the transaction provided to the press by CAA's Stephen Rivers, strongly implied that the music mogul David Geffen was the source, since Geffen, who was known to be loquacious with the press, owned ten million shares of MCA stock and stood to profit mightily from the sale. However, a widely held view among many of the people involved in the deal, and also among some of its observers who had worked on the Sony-Columbia transaction, was that Ovitz had engineered the leak.

Its purposes were multifarious. Ovitz, who ritually charts his life, certainly had a timetable for the deal. He had seen at first hand how Sony, its Western qualities notwithstanding, deliberated in a distinctly Japanese fashion before deciding to go ahead with the Columbia acquisition; ten months elapsed between Sony's first conversations with Columbia executives and the consummation of the deal. Ovitz was well aware that Wasserman and Sheinberg would not have the patience for such a wait. Moreover, Ovitz was intent on doing everything possible to avoid any repetition of the criticism in Washington and the congressional hearings that the Sony-Columbia deal had triggered. According to one person at CAA, the plan was to finalize the deal while Congress was in recess—that is, sometime between early November and the beginning of January.

In mid-September, there was reportedly still discord in the upper levels of Matsushita's management about whether or not to proceed with this bold move. Indeed, according to a story in the magazine *Keizaikai*, Hirata, who had had exposure to the software industry in the course of nearly two decades at Matsushita's JVC unit, had had to overcome initial opposition to the project from Akio Tanii, the president, who had trained as an engineer, and from his protégé, Tsuzo Murase, who was Matsushita's executive vice-president. A participant in the deal said that Matsushita was greatly upset by the leak, because the executives felt that "it made it sound as though things were so much farther ahead than they really were." One of the leak's benefits, then, was to remove any illusion of open-endedness from the process, and to insure that from that moment on the pressure on Matsushita to act would be constant.

Perhaps most significant, the leak also applied pressure on Wasserman. While he had seemed in the last year or so to be signalling a greater readiness to make a deal, and while his deepening pessimism about the economy was intensifying that desire, his ability to walk away from the deal was never in doubt. Once the story had leaked, however, MCA's stock price ran up from thirty-six dollars a share to sixty-one, and Wasserman was well aware that if the deal fell through the price would sink back into the low thirties, perhaps even into the twenties. Several people involved in the deal speculated that Ovitz, who, having studied Wasserman for years, was well aware of his concern for his shareholders, had made an astute calculation. One said, "He figured that the best way to insure against Lew's walking away was to put him in a moral dilemma—to make the decision to do it so invidious to his shareholders that it would be very difficult for him. Mike is good at reading people."

The story also served as a political trial balloon. It allowed Strauss and his partners to begin their job of massaging any potentially troublesome members of Congress, so that by the time the deal was concluded there would be no real dissent. In addition, it allowed the Matsushita executives to gauge public opinion in the United States. As the *Yomiuri Shimbun* reported on October 6th, "A manager of the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI) said, 'At present the reaction in the American press is fifty per cent favorable, thirty per cent neutral, and twenty per cent adverse.' . . . The release of information before the agreement has . . . been a blessing." The generally sanguine outlook was crucial for Matsushita. Akio Tanii was quoted in the *Asahi Shimbun*, one of Japan's leading newspapers, as saying, "What I'm most concerned about is public opinion in the United States. I will never do things in a way that will invite a backlash."

Finally, the price range that was reported in the *Wall Street Journal*—from eighty to ninety dollars a share—was so high that it would probably discourage other bidders. To be sure, the difficulty of financing a transaction of this size in the economic climate of late 1990 meant that other bidders were unlikely to pose a threat, but any prudent dealmaker would have remembered the lesson of the bidding war for RJR Nabisco—that it was triggered by a lowball bid for the company.

The Ovitz team members (including Herbert Allen, who was said by one person involved in the deal to have confirmed the story) deny responsibility for the leak. They point out that the leak could well have damaged them. After all, they say, it immediately drove the price of MCA stock from thirty-six dollars a share to sixty-one. (True enough, though it is by no means clear that Matsushita ended up paying a premium for the rise in stock price.) Besides, the leak would obviously be so traumatic for Matsushita that the company might well have backed away from the deal. It apparently was traumatic: the *Mainichi Shimbun* quoted one Matsushita executive as saying that news coming out during negotiations was like "being suddenly caught putting on makeup backstage." However, after a couple of days of "damage control," one person in the deal has said, Ovitz persuaded the top Matsushita executives to proceed. He was remarkably well positioned to do that, inasmuch as he had been in a meeting with Tanii and Hirata, in Osaka, when the faxes of the *Wall Street Journal* story were handed to them.

From the early days of the negotiations, MCA executives and their advisers found Ovitz's centrality peculiar. Not only was he an outsider to mem-

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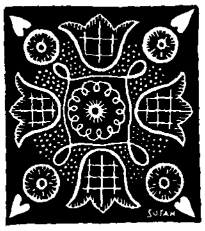
bers of the long-established New York M. & A. fraternity ("For the first few days, I didn't know his first name. I thought his name was Mr. Mikovitz," one adviser commented) but his role—that of a consultant who was commanding the deal team of investment bankers and lawyers—was one they had never encountered before. Even stranger, they thought, was the nonappearance of his client. One person involved in the deal recalls asking Sheinberg, only half in jest, "Sid, does he really represent these people?" And Felix Rohatyn, recalling a Matsushita request—through Ovitz—for confidential information, said he had told Sheinberg, "'You've got to look these people in the eye. You can't give them any information without even seeing who they are." But although there was some speculation in the Japanese press that Tanii might come to the United States, he did not; it was Hirata and Toyonaga who finally made their sole appearance in the pre-deal period—at the evening at Wasserman's home, on October 7th.

Also in the first week of October, stories began to appear in the Japanese press stating that Matsushita might pay as much as $4.5 to $5.3 billion for MCA's film and music software divisions, or, alternatively, about $6 billion for the whole company (roughly $60 a share), while MCA was seeking a purchase price of between $7.4 and $8.5 billion (roughly between $80 and $95 a share). This was, of course, dramatically at variance with the price range Ovitz had conveyed to Sheinberg and Rohatyn. And the MCA executives, who were following the Japanese press, apparently did not put much credence in these figures. "When we saw that sixty to sixty-five dollars a share, we were laughing," one of them told me. "We were sitting here with our calculators, multiplying the number of shares we owned by a hundred dollars. But then we said, 'No, let's not be pigs—multiply by ninety dollars. Lew will never take less than ninety dollars.' "



The stories in the Japanese press about the purported discrepancy in price were capped by a report that came over the Nikkei Telecom wire service at approximately 1 A.M. Tokyo time on October 25th. It stated that MCA wanted a price of as much as $8.5 billion ($95 per share), and quoted an anonymous senior executive of Matsushita as saying that the company was seeking a "cooling off" period in the negotiations, to last until mid-November. If the two sides were unable to agree on a price by then, this executive was quoted as saying, "we are prepared to pull out of the deal." Hirata was awakened in the middle of the night after Stephen Banner—Simpson, Thacher's lead lawyer for Matsushita—alerted a counterpart in Osaka, and within two hours Matsushita had put out a release denying that the talks were stalled. Trading in MCA stock, which had dropped as much as ten points during the day, was halted at $50 a share.

"The Japanese have a hierarchical view of talking to the press," someone involved in the transaction told me. "They made a great deal of the fact that it had not been said officially by a Matsushita executive. To them, if it was said by an unnamed executive it almost meant it hadn't been said. And then they thought that what was said in Japan didn't have much impact here. They said, 'We only put it out in Japan. What's the beef?' "

MCA executives, at a company conference in Palm Springs, were extremely perturbed by the report and its effect on MCA stock. Just as some on the Matsushita side had become convinced that MCA leaked the initial story in order to cause the price of the stock to run up, MCA partisans now believed that Matsushita was using the media to depress the stock price. But they also wondered whether there was any truth to the news report.

At that time, according to an MCA executive I talked to, investment bankers from Allen & Company were at work compiling information for the deal's due-diligence report, and one of them told him that he had never talked to the Japanese—that all their work was given to Ovitz, and Ovitz then presented it to Matsushita. The executive recalled a discussion with his colleagues in Palm Springs in which they were struggling to understand the plot they were all now involved in. "I said, 'Ovitz is in the middle. All we know about what they are saying is what he tells us, and all they know about what we are saying is what he tells them—and he may be telling both of us things that the other has never said. There could be an enormous amount of filtering going on.' "

When the negotiations finally began, the day after the welcoming dinner at the Plaza Athénée, MCA executives felt that at least some of their misgivings had been justified. Ovitz, who two months earlier had spoken to Rohatyn and Sheinberg of a price range of $75 to $90, now announced that Matsushita was prepared to pay $60 a share in cash, plus an equity stake worth about $3 a share in WWOR, an MCA-owned television station to be spun off to shareholders. (United States laws forbid foreign ownership of a broadcast property.) By way of explanation, Ovitz referred to changed world conditions (an increasing likelihood of war in the Persian Gulf, a weakening economy), and in private conversations with Sheinberg he swore that he had learned the amount of Matsushita's offer only an hour before he presented it, and that he had exhorted the company to offer $65 a share instead.

It may well be that the Matsushita executives had not trusted Ovitz sufficiently to bring him into their confidence on this point, for, while they certainly relied on him for the human elements of the deal, they had a second, secret team of advisers working on the numbers. Someone who has advised Sony says, "The Japanese never rely on just one adviser. There are always second and third tracks." In the early summer of 1990, Hirata had engaged the mergers-and-acquisitions partnership of Nomura Wasserstein Perella, with offices in Osaka and Tokyo, to work on the transaction. Matsushita "hired Nomura Wasserstein Perella as advisers because they're Japanese and the client trusts Japanese people," one person explained. "The client was coming into Hollywood blind, and therefore hired a Seeing Eye dog—Ovitz—but didn't trust him. He's a white American. It takes many years for someone like a Mickey Schulhof"—the Sony USA executive—"to win Japanese trust. On the other hand, they didn't want to offend Ovitz. So Nomura Wasserstein Perella was to function as what is called in the Kabuki plays the 'shadow person.' " According to this man, the Matsushita executives were leery of Ovitz when it came to price, and in this regard, especially, wanted a second

p. 21: Where the daughter of the stars meets the mother of presidents.

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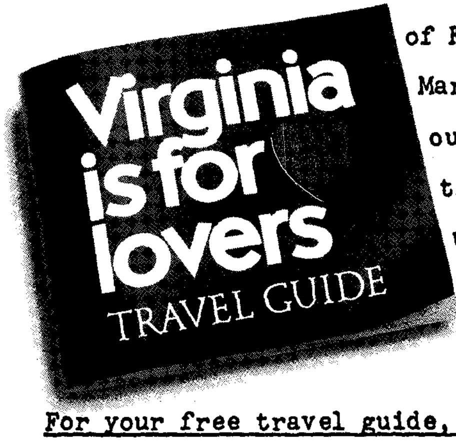

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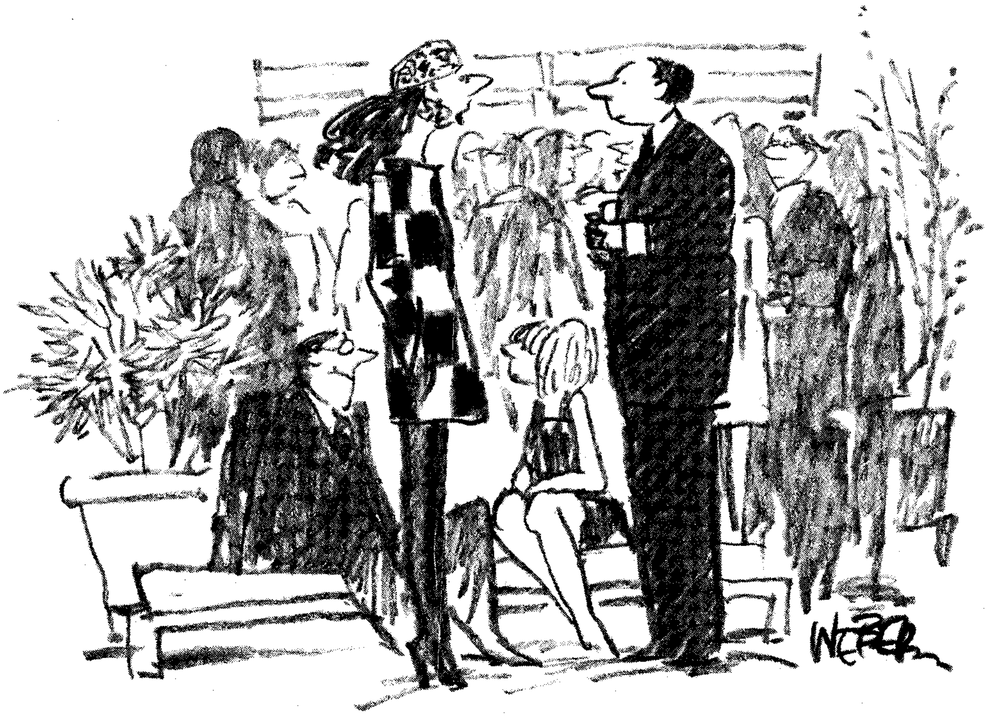

*"I don't know anybody here but the hostess—and, of course, in a deeper sense, myself."*

• •

opinion. "They realized that for him what counted was getting the deal done—that he wouldn't care what price they paid. They didn't want to look like fools. Sony, at least for the time being, is looking like a fool. They were very concerned that they not pay a big, foolish number that would indicate that money meant nothing to them."

While Nomura Wasserstein Perella's Japanese bankers were assisted by American colleagues, only the Japanese dealt with Matsushita directly. And these bankers, although they did not attend any of the final negotiating sessions in November, had rooms in the Waldorf-Astoria, as did the Matsushita executives, and were in close contact with them. During that week, according to one person, they counselled the Matsushita executives, "Don't be in a hurry. It's not a competitive situation. Remember who you are."

OVITZ's role during the week of negotiations still *looked* central. In what one participant refers to as "shuttle diplomacy," he was going back and forth between the law offices of Wachtell, Lipton, Rosen & Katz, where the MCA team was encamped, and those of Simpson, Thacher & Bartlett, where Matsushita was meeting. When he met with his client in an enormous conference room at Simpson, Thacher, he still assumed his leadership position, in the Japanese fashion: Hirata, as the most senior executive present, sat at the midpoint of the long conference table, with his subordinates fanning out alongside him in order of rank, and Ovitz sat opposite Hirata, with his subordinates similarly arranged.

To some on the MCA side, however, it seemed that Ovitz, who had kept such tight control of the transaction from the start, had now lost the ability to move it along; it was drifting, rudderless, they believed, in large part because Ovitz, though he was cast as Matsushita's principal negotiator, seemed to be as much at sea about what his client might be willing to pay as MCA was. After MCA flatly rejected Matsushita's offer of sixty dollars in cash, Matsushita came back the following day with an offer of sixty-four dollars in cash, but that, too, MCA rejected. MCA was unwilling to make a counterproposal. "We were not going to name a price," Rohatyn told me. "Either they were going to make a proposal or not, but we were not going to have the price end up in the *Mainichi Shimbun* as part of a deal that didn't happen."

While Ovitz may have had no idea what Matsushita would ultimately be willing to pay, it is also true that the MCA advisers did not know what Wasserman would ultimately be willing to accept; as usual, he was keeping his own counsel. It was not surprising, therefore, that there was no synchronized motion. On the Wednesday night before Thanksgiving—three days after the discussions began—most, if not all, of the advisers concluded that the deal was dead. An MCA board meeting was called for Thanksgiving, at which the advisers planned to recommend against accepting Matsushita's offer of sixty-four dollars in cash.

Ovitz flew to Los Angeles for the holiday. Allen planned to fly to London on Thursday morning. Wasserman and Strauss and their wives went to dinner at "21." Recalling that dinner, Strauss told me, "The deal had shut down. We didn't discuss it. We discussed whether to have the chicken or the fish. Edie Wasserman drank water and Helen Strauss had three Scotches, as usual. It was an evening of nostalgia and reminiscences. And then, in the car, I said, 'Well, Lew, I guess it wasn't meant to be—you can't have a damn stroke over losing a deal.' He said, 'You're right. The only thing that troubles me—we can't eat any better, how many more dinners at "21" can we have?—is the management, and the shareholders.' And he said, 'You have to make up your mind before you go into negotiations what the parameters are, or you get carried away with the momentum of the negotiations—you know that as well as anyone. And it's just a shame—when two or three bucks more would have done it.' "

Over the next fifteen hours or so, Strauss and Allen, primarily, worked to bring the deal back. "I could trust Herb with anything," Strauss said. "We could say things to each other that people on the other side might not ordinarily say." While Strauss did not attend the negotiating session on Thursday (and did not vote on the merger), he was, by his own and others' accounts, a vital participant in the bridge building that was required at that moment to bring the two sides together. (That activity, of course, violated the spirit, if not the letter, of the terms of his participation, since he was not to be involved in the financial negotiation.)

"The Japanese had great confidence in Strauss as a former government official," Rohatyn commented. Besides, he had represented them before and was close to Toyonaga. So he provided them with a channel of communication and trust that no one else on their side did—not Ovitz, not Allen. However important, even indispensable, Strauss's part was, it was one he was assigned rather than one he created. An MCA adviser told me, "Lew was not speaking idly—he *meant* for Strauss to go and do what he did." Another person involved went as far as to suggest that Strauss performed at that juncture the role he had been intended to perform from the outset, in the schematic of the deal. "He was a conduit," this person said.

On Thanksgiving morning, Ovitz, after talking by telephone with Hirata, called Sheinberg and told him that Hirata wanted to meet with him and Wasserman, and that Matsushita would raise its offer by two dollars a share. "I said, 'Let's find a small room for this meeting,'" Sheinberg told me. "The whole process had been done in these enormous rooms, in the most abstract, inhuman way. I think one of my greatest contributions to this deal was finding a small room." Hirata came over to the Wachtell, Lipton offices from the Waldorf-Astoria, which is diagonally across Park Avenue. (Ovitz remained in Los Angeles.) "Hirata said, 'It has taken us a long time to come this short distance,'" Sheinberg continued. "We were touched by that. That convinced us that psychologically he wanted to make this deal. At that moment, there was some human connection that hadn't been there before."

After they reached an agreement in principle on price—Matsushita would raise its offer by two dollars a share, to sixty-six dollars in cash, plus the equity stake in WWOR—there were myriad other issues still unresolved, and those were fought over bitterly in the next three days. Questions that the MCA advisers thought had already been settled were reopened. Even on Monday morning, an hour before the contract was scheduled for signing, a new batch of minor issues surfaced. The

p. 69: Proof that the Loch Ness Monster and the Big Bad Wolf really do exist.

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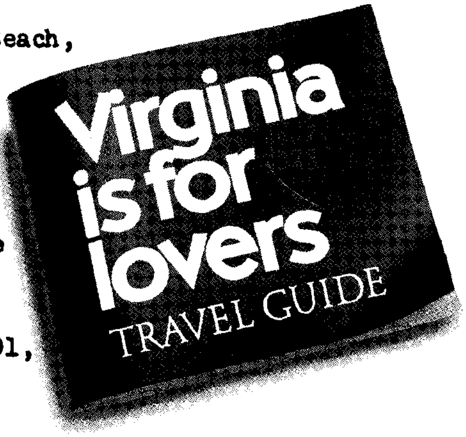

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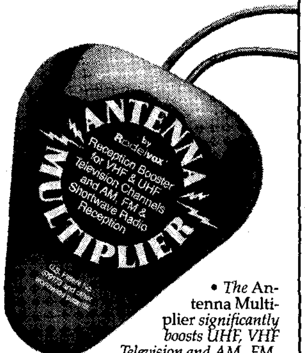
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signing was set for 8 A.M. in New York; at that moment, Tanii, in Osaka, was to go on Japanese television. His appearance had to be put off for over an hour.

Commenting on the arduousness of the negotiation, Rohatyn said, "This was completely contrary to their culture. The Japanese are accustomed to negotiating for two weeks, then going home for several months, then coming back—it can take a year. Here Ovitz had pushed them to understand that it had to be done in one week. And yet it was clear in negotiating sessions that their party didn't have negotiating authority—they had to be calling Japan constantly. And the time change made that difficult. So it was a combination of culture differences, language differences, time differences. Their philosophy of negotiation is war by other means, with an open-ended time frame. Here a negotiation has a certain human element which is much more sentimental. People recognize that they are buying not only a business but something that involves people, and that there are emotions that can be traumatic. You make allowances for them in the way you negotiate. But in this deal—and in deals with other Japanese companies that I've seen—the human side was not a factor. Here I never saw the side of the negotiations that I've seen in nine out of ten situations as they near the end, where people generally sit down and try to work things out. Instead, to the end we were lobbing Scuds at each other, firing Patriot missiles."

This was a deal that apparently would not have happened if Matsushita had not agreed to raise its offer by two dollars a share. That two dollars was not insignificant—it amounted to an additional two hundred million dollars. But the reason that the deal had hinged on it, Rohatyn emphasized, was not strictly financial; rather, the two dollars had come to symbolize in the minds of the MCA executives and their advisers a broader issue—"whether we could really talk to these people or not."

THAT is the pivotal question, upon which the ultimate success or failure of the deal will turn. But it was scarcely a question that could be fully answered by Matsushita's deciding to raise its offer by two dollars (even if that did signal a degree of flexibility and a commitment to the transaction). It was, rather, a matter that reasonably should have been addressed and explored by both principals long before they reached the negotiating table.

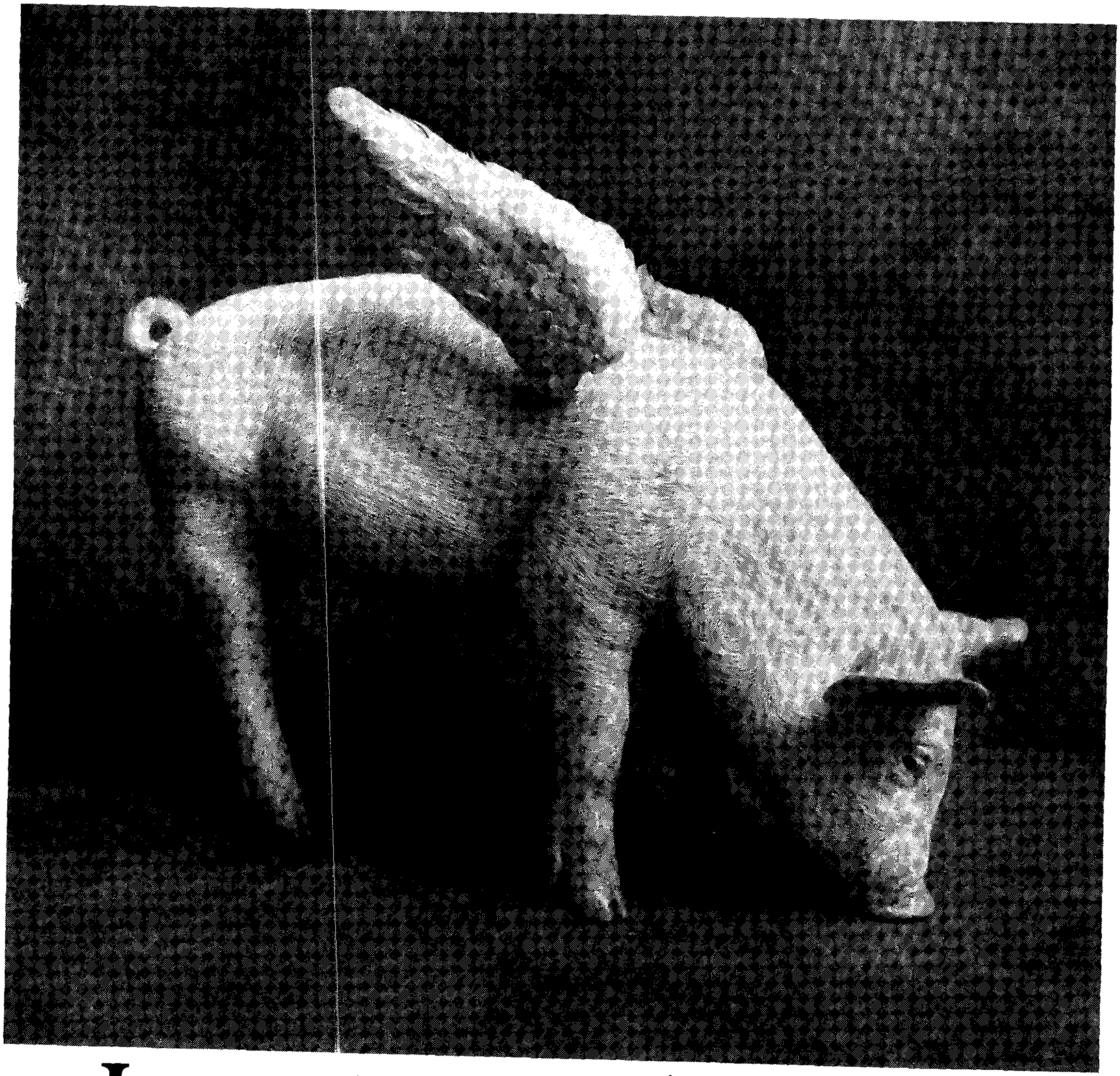
Instead, both Matsushita and MCA essentially made a leap of faith—as, presumably, they were intended to. By keeping the two sides apart until the very end, Ovitz had insured not only that his own role was immeasurably enhanced, and that he could control what each side was being told, and that there would be no risk of Sheinberg's antagonizing the Japanese with his volatility, but also that neither side would begin to fathom, from direct experience, the huge gulf separating them. It is possible that if they had in fact done so at least one of the parties—understanding that the sine qua non of a successful corporate merger is a human meshing—would have declined to go forward.

During the week of negotiations—the parties' first substantial exposure to one another—there was a hint of the true depth of that gulf: the sessions were fractious, and devoid of emotional rapport. It resonated, too, in the first words that Tanii uttered publicly upon the deal's signing. While Wasserman, Sheinberg, and Hirata were offering champagne toasts to one another in New York, Tanii began his televised press conference in Osaka—a proceeding for which he had been drilled with more than a hundred prepared questions and answers. Probably the most predictable question was the one that had been asked of Akio Morita when Sony acquired Columbia: Would his company be willing to produce a movie about the wartime role of the late Emperor Hirohito? Morita had said he would never interfere with such a production, though he could not guarantee that theatres in Japan would be willing to show it.

However, according to an article in the *Mainichi Shimbun*, when Tanii was asked "What would you do if MCA produces a picture in which the Emperor of Japan appears as a war criminal?" he replied, "MCA is a company with a good history and tradition, and will exercise appropriate judgment." Pressed on this and other questions about the making of films critical of Japan, Tanii stated, according to the *Asahi Shimbun*, "Since this acquisition is itself aimed at the coöperation of two countries, I am sure that such movies will never be produced." Several days later—after a flurry of articles in the United States and some expressions of concern from Congress and also from the Japanese government—he issued a statement saying that Matsushita "has no intention of becoming involved in decisions regarding the subject or content of creative products at MCA." (One person involved in Tanii's tutelage told me, "Creative independence was one of the attitudes we thought we had to be on top of from Day One. Tanii had been prepared on that, but he did screw up.")

Tanii's performance was significant not so much because it presaged overt censorship (the Matsushita businessmen are too astute to endanger the value of their investment that way) but because it underlined just how radical and wild this foray into Hollywood was for the sober Matsushita. And while Tanii is apparently willing to subvert his instincts on the "creative" side, it seems unlikely that he will adopt a laissez-faire approach to the management of the company. In fact, one who worked on grooming him for the press told me that he and his colleagues had struggled to draw a distinction in Tanii's remarks between MCA's "creative independence," in which Tanii was supposedly prepared to say he would not interfere, and its "financial independence," which was another matter altogether.

What Ovitz had emphasized to Sheinberg from the start was not only that Matsushita would want management to remain in place but that the managers would retain their autonomy—far more autonomy than if they were acquired by another American company, or even a European one. Matsushita's total lack of familiarity with the business would, in effect, be a blessing. Ovitz also pointed out that Matsushita had a history of allowing its divisions autonomy, even in its own hardware business. In fact, in September, 1990, when MCA was having trouble concluding a music deal that it was negotiating with JVC, Sheinberg



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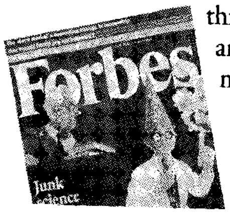

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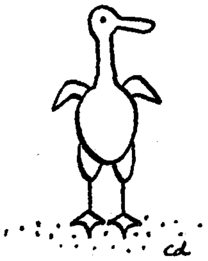
had asked Ovitz to speak to the Matsushita executives about it, and Ovitz reported to Sheinberg that the executives hadn't even known about the deal, and pointed to this episode as an illustration of the freedom that MCA, as a Matsushita subsidiary, would enjoy.

While it is true that Matsushita has granted its subsidiaries autonomy, the autonomy has always been heavily qualified. "Headquarters-subsidiary relations in Matsushita is a process of 'hands off' management: Japan gives a sales and a profit target and the subsidiary must achieve them. . . . As long as these targets are achieved, local management has complete autonomy on everything else," Tomio Koide, the managing director of Matsushita's subsidiary in Singapore, observed in a 1988 Harvard Business School case study. But the study then quotes Shunji Matsuoka, the president of Matsushita's largest European production subsidiary, in Cardiff, Wales, on how quickly freedom is removed when targets are not met: "Losses show bad health and invite many doctors from Japan who provide advice and support."



Steadiness is a cardinal virtue in the world of Japanese business. Konosuke Matsushita, notably unforgiving of irregular profits, wrote, "My proverb about management says that if we fight a hundred wars we should win a hundred victories." He also wrote, "Unsuccessful business employs a wrong management. You should not find its causes in bad fortune, unfavorable surroundings, or wrong timing."

However, there are probably few industries less steady, and less susceptible to fixed profit targets, than Hollywood's. Those entrepreneurs who have flourished in that community over decades have resigned themselves to volatility. One Hollywood executive recalled Wasserman's having told him some time ago, "If you look at any major studio over a ten-year period, it will be profitable. But that's how you must look at it—you can't expect a studio to be profitable year in and year out."

Moreover, Matsushita, which examined the Sony-Columbia transaction in minute detail, and, as was its wont, managed to improve upon what the innovator had done—paying a more reasonable price, keeping a management team intact, eliciting no public outrage—certainly continued to scrutinize that transaction in the course of conducting its own. Sony, meanwhile, had apparently tried to enter Hollywood in what it perceived as the American way: it gave Guber and Peters free rein, and under their aegis Columbia became notorious for its profligacy. But in May, 1991, came the first sign that this laissez-faire period might be coming to an end, as Jon Peters—a former hairdresser, who was the more controversial member of the duo, and the one who had been more identified with excess at the studio—left his position as co-chairman of Columbia Pictures. In August, the studio was renamed Sony Pictures Entertainment.

Witnessing Sony's experience, and its embarrassment, could only have encouraged the habitually tightfisted Matsushita to strengthen its reserve. While Sony executives made just one visit to their studio in 1990, and Peters and Guber only a single visit to Japan, the top Matsushita and MCA executives exchanged visits in the first two months after the acquisition, and a Matsushita delegation returned in late August. Almost immediately after the deal closed, moreover, Matsushita sent a high-level executive to be stationed at MCA. He is said to have several assistants working out of a Matsushita office in nearby Century City. And if history is any guide, he may soon be joined by other senior colleagues. In 1974, when Matsushita acquired Motorola's television business in the United States, Motorola had a strong research-and-development capability. Not long afterward, however, a group of managers and engineers arrived from Japan to provide direction, and, before long, more than half of the American engineers, frustrated by the controls imposed on them, had departed. This practice is not unique to Matsushita. A recent article in the *Times*, which reported that Americans working for Japanese companies in the United States are contending that their Japanese employers reserve the best jobs for Japanese managers, also mentioned that many Japanese companies install Japanese executives to work alongside their American counterparts

("Some people like to call it a shadow staff," one employee was quoted as saying), in order to help them work with Tokyo headquarters, or to control them.

In an editorial-page article in the *Mainichi Shimbun*, entitled "A Reporter's Comment: We Wish Matsushita to Preserve the 'Virtues' of American Pictures. Do Not Deteriorate the Free Environment of Production Even If It Is Difficult to Control the Business," the writer questioned whether it would be feasible to combine two such disparate cultures. Referring to Matsushita, he wrote, "The corporate culture is steady and honest, to put it positively, or lacks flexibility and imagination, to put it negatively. Their management has been said to consist of 'clones' who think and behave the same way. The company has recently begun to try to reform this corporate culture, but it is far from the one in U.S. motion-picture productions, which is free and active. . . . Matsushita and a U.S. production [company] may be as different as 'water and oil.' " According to another article in the *Mainichi Shimbun*, executives at Matsushita continued to be plagued by doubts about the wisdom of the deal: "Even after the final negotiations were started, some Matsushita executives had objected that it was too dangerous to invest in a division in which the company had no previous experience. But what allowed the acquisition to go ahead was the fear expressed by another executive, who said, 'If Matsushita continues to simply be limited to hardware specialization, we may become a "large-scale minor company" in the future.' "

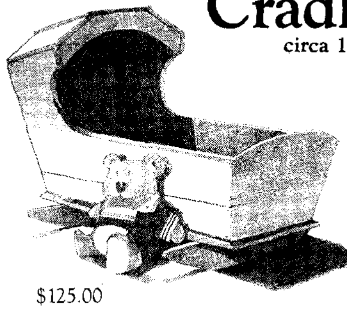
Doubts were also being entertained by senior executives at MCA in the months following the sale of the company, but, amid all the anxiety, Wasserman seemed relatively sanguine. He had put his house in order, after all: done as well as he could by MCA shareholders and employees, and made sure that the company—Stein's bequest to him—would not be broken up in the near future.

Still, as the industry's de-facto protector, Wasserman could hardly be impervious to the loss of American dominance that this deal, coming on the heels of others, represented. Five of the seven major Hollywood studios had been sold or else merged into larger companies in the last several years, and four of the new owners had come from abroad. Moreover, since 1985 multinational companies based outside the United States had spent more than thirty-five billion dollars to acquire American media and entertainment properties—an expenditure that prompted Steven Ross, the chairman and co-C.E.O. of Time Warner (who was himself in search of foreign partners for "strategic alliances," but only involving minority interests), to decry the activity as a "fire sale."

To some in Hollywood—where, not surprisingly, its culture is taken quite seriously—the transfer of these assets signals the loss of a cultural patrimony; one industry executive remarked, "It's the equivalent of France selling the Louvre, even though the French can still be the curators." While one may argue that in an increasingly global world national boundaries and identities will over time tend to blur, and that concern about Hollywood's being American-owned is chauvinistic and retrograde, it appears that the Japanese have approached their Hollywood acquisitions with a traditionally nationalistic mind-set.

Sony and Matsushita, despite their fierce competition in the Beta-VHS wars, have coöperated on occasion, especially when pressure has been put upon them to do so by MITI. And it seems likely that the larger objective here—at a time of rapidly changing, even revolutionary, hardware formats—is for Japanese companies to control enough software so that they can be assured of continuing to dominate the world markets in hardware, particularly HDTV. Tanii and Sony's Norio Ohga held a long dinner meeting shortly before the Matsushita acquisition of MCA was finalized. And, the morning after Tanii announced Matsushita's acquisition of MCA, Ohga told the Nikkei Telecom wire service that he welcomed the move. "The decision means there will be two Japanese companies controlling both hardware and programs in the audiovisual field," he said.

When I asked Wasserman what his thoughts were about foreign ownership of such a large portion of the American entertainment industry, he replied, tersely, "None." On being



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pressed, he added, "It's going to be one world—though I'm not going to live to see it." Acknowledging that it would have been inconceivable twenty years ago for this quintessentially American industry not to be American-owned, Wasserman said, with a note of resignation, "They have the money. Isn't that what we're talking about? It's impossible to have a savings rate of fourteen per cent in Japan and three per cent here and for us to be competitive. If those people are going to work the way they do— Students in Japan go to school forty-six weeks a year, six days a week. My grandson is always on holiday."

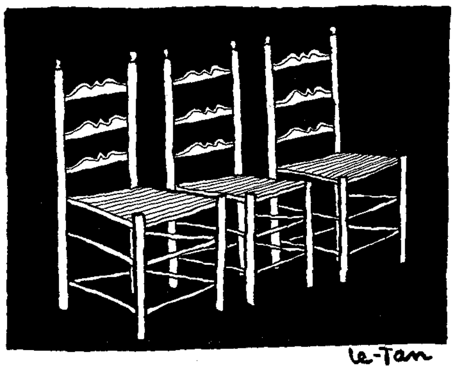
While Wasserman seemed more comfortable reflecting on the past (he was voluble on similarities he sees between Konosuke Matsushita and Jules Stein), other MCA executives were intent on trying to parse the present. The visit of Tanii and his delegation in January offered little illumination. (They were brought to MCA by Ovitz, who in dropping them off said, as Sheinberg later recalled it, "something to the effect of 'They're all yours,' " and Tanii then gave a speech to MCA employees which had been re-drafted at CAA.) One MCA man said of the visitors, "They looked like accountants. They were very polite, smiled, and talked in platitudes. That is how it will be for a year or so—until something happens. 'Software' is a really bad term for what we do. It depersonalizes it, makes it into something you put into a VCR—but it's not. It represents hopes and dreams, it creates the mood of the country, you're both leading and following—it's all very volatile, emotional stuff. There are going to be emotional repercussions that will be very hard for them to deal with. I don't think they have the slightest idea what they have walked into."

How Matsushita could have entered into a transaction of such moment without seeking to become acquainted with key executives, and to learn from them what they do, seemed to be the universal question in the top echelons of MCA. One executive told me, "What makes the entertainment industry unique is that it has such a soft underpinning—the assets go home at night, as Louis B. Mayer used to say. But it is very Japanese to ignore the human element. Also, it was probably too difficult to believe that the underpinnings of a business are human relationships, things that are intuitive and emotional—especially if you're a hardware company."

Of all the MCA executives, Sheinberg was the deal's greatest booster, and, probably, the one who was most valuable in moving it forward. Strauss told me, "This deal never would have been made without Sid. If being abrasive, mercurial, and emotional are his weaknesses, they never showed here. He was as calm, unemotional, and objective as a person could be. He had spent a lot of time with Ovitz, and developed the confidence that Ovitz could deliver what he said he could." Rohatyn remarked that he had "never seen Sid so conciliatory," and another participant commented that when Wasserman had become angered "Sid kept him even."

As Ovitz had correctly discerned from the outset, it was Sheinberg to whom this deal could offer the most. And he did indeed appear to be reaping great (some thought inordinate) rewards. He was contractually guaranteed to succeed Wasserman as chairman, and though such contracts can, of course, be broken for a price, his position was far better than it would have been in the absence of this deal. In addition, he received a twenty-one-million-dollar cash bonus for replacing his existing employment contract with a new, five-year contract. With MCA stock holdings valued at about ninety-two million dollars, Sheinberg would thus receive roughly a hundred and thirteen million dollars, along with a salary of $8.6 million a year.

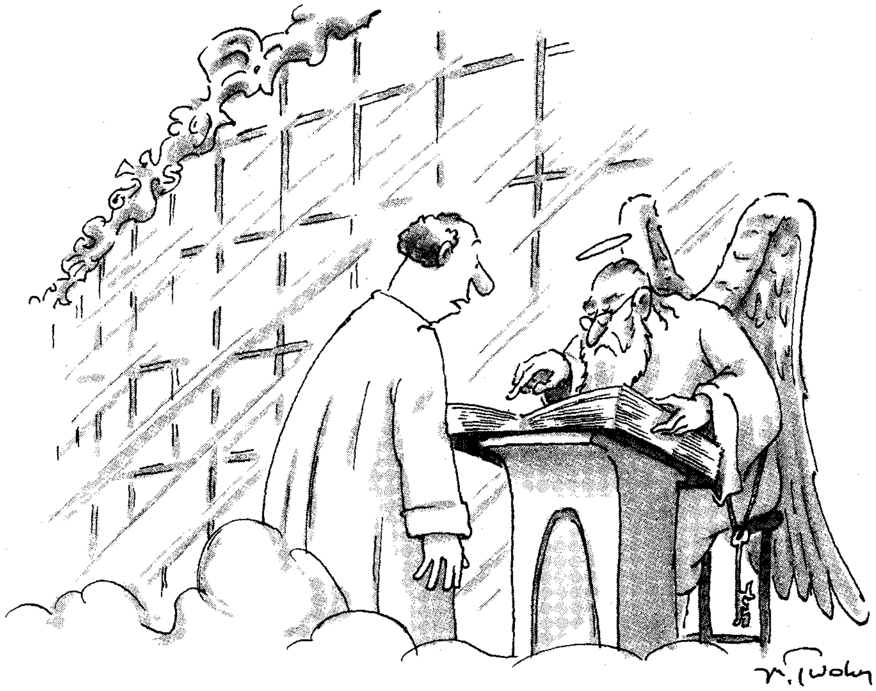
His mood when I interviewed him in March, however, was more troubled than celebratory. He and Wasserman had recently returned from a trip to Osaka, where, for the first time, in their new incarnation as subordinates, they had undergone a budget review. According to one friend of Sheinberg's, the process left him convinced that Matsushita was frightened by the acquisition, and was uncertain how to proceed. (Sheinberg declined to comment on this). Friends said, too, that he was finding his day-to-day tasks, now involving the integration of the two companies, more onerous, and that he was disturbed by persistent press speculation that, sooner or later, Ovitz would run MCA. Acknowledging that he has found the period of transition difficult, Sheinberg told me, ruefully, "Someone said recently that since this deal was made Wasserman looks younger and Sheinberg looks older. We were very conflicted about this deal. Together, we have been here eighty-some-odd years. But we genuinely did believe that we had to form a strategic alliance. . . . Time Warner was like the final recognition that what may have passed for our ability to compete in a certain kind of world had to be reëvaluated. The world is going to require you to be bigger, better capitalized, stronger than we were able to be on our own."



Another MCA executive told me that the retrospective consensus in the MCA executive suites was that Ovitz had initially indicated that Matsushita would pay a range of seventy-five to ninety dollars a share simply in order to bring Wasserman to the table. "If he had said their range was in the sixties, no meetings would ever have taken place," this executive said. "We had to be given the illusion it was at least in the eighties."

When Sheinberg was asked about the discrepancy between Ovitz's initial statement and Matsushita's offer, he responded with an anecdote about having gone to look at a house that his son was buying, and having been advised by the broker to underbid the asking price, which the seller had presumably set with the broker's encouragement. Then, referring to Ovitz's opening statement, he said, "We did believe it to be the realm—it would be dishonest to say otherwise. We did go through a period of sitting there, asking ourselves, 'Why are we here?' "

In the course of a lengthy interview, Sheinberg emphasized repeatedly that the deal had been unlike any other. "It was so odd not to meet with the principals," he said. "We didn't meet Tanii until he came and visited in January. The chairman, who is the son-in-law of the founder, we just met two weeks ago, in Osaka. I don't know why people met so little. The structuring was admittedly being done by Mr. Ovitz. It was a very traumatic experience for us—it *is* a traumatic experience, and will last a long time. Because there's a lot that's unknown. Only a fool cannot recognize that. Everyone gets married thinking it's forever—and fifty per cent of the time, or something like that, it doesn't work. And the lack of human contact made it more traumatic. As did their lack of understanding of the business—an understanding that can only come through human interchange." Sheinberg concluded, rather wearily, "They were supposed to have been educated by Mr. Ovitz." Several times during the conversation, he had remarked that those close to him tell him he is naïve. "The future will show if that education was adequate," he said now.



*"You're kidding! You count S.A.T.s?"*

PORTENTS of the future may have been uncertain at best in MCA's sleek black tower, but at the Pei building in Beverly Hills, in Ovitz's inner sanctum, where bright-yellow petals floated in a glass bowl filled with water, Japanese-style, there was no malaise. For Ovitz the deal has been an unmitigated triumph. *Time*, devoting a sidebar to him in its article on the deal, quoted an Ovitz colleague who described him as an "economic samurai." Dozens of articles in newspapers and magazines credited him, appropriately, with being the deal's architect; they also reported (the most likely source appears to have been CAA) that he would be receiving a fee of forty million dollars—gargantuan, unheard of, even by Wall Street standards. Several people involved in the deal, however, told me that they suspected Ovitz had been paid not forty million dollars but, rather, a fee more in line with what the investment bankers received—between eight million and seventeen million dollars. In some of the articles, there was also an explanation (which, again, seems most likely to have come from CAA) for his having been absent when the deal was finally concluded. *Los Angeles* magazine said of Ovitz's departure for home on the night before Thanksgiving, "He apparently felt that if he as the go-between appeared to be giving up the fight, it might jolt Matsushita and MCA into action." Thus what was for Ovitz a negative (his being so noticeably peripheral at the critical juncture) was transformed with the help of the press into a positive—a shrewd, and perhaps even pivotal, tactical move.

Ovitz has continued to minimize his on-the-record appearances in the press, still preferring his longtime posture of one who is press-shy—despite the masterly cultivation of the press carried on by his public-relations expert, Stephen Rivers. Ovitz emphasized, therefore, that the encomiums that really mattered to him came not from the press but from his client. The Japanese are very chary with compliments, Ovitz said, but at the end Hirata had told him that the team he had assembled was extraordinary. "We wanted a team analogous to what we have at the agency—one that would work like a Swiss watch," Ovitz commented, using a favorite phrase. Indeed, the deal's only gaffe came after it was signed. It involved the disposition of Yosemite Park & Curry Company, an MCA subsidiary that controls the hotels and nearly all other businesses in Yosemite National Park. After an extended, highly charged public battle between Interior Secretary Manuel Lujan and MCA (during which Sheinberg accused Lujan of "Japan-bashing"), MCA agreed to sell its interest in the park operations to a private, nonprofit group. But this contretemps, set in Washington, fell in the bailiwick not of Ovitz but of Strauss—the sole member of the "Swiss watch" team who had not, of course, been handpicked by Ovitz.

Now Ovitz is moving ahead with a plan for the coming year which he had charted in the summer of 1989 and then shelved while he concentrated on the Matsushita transaction. He would not divulge its full scope but did say that he is devoting much of his time to corporate dealmaking. (He is said to have remarked to one friend recently, "How much can you make representing an individual, on a really big deal? A million? You make *millions* representing companies.") He is currently representing Apple Computer, Paramount Communications, and Coca-Cola, among others.

Friends say that Ovitz, who was a high-school classmate of Michael Milken, the deposed and now imprisoned financier, was fascinated by Wall Street through much of the eighties. In fact, one associate says that Ovitz and Milken consulted often about the en-

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tertainment industry, and Ovitz became angry with Milken after he failed to make Ovitz one of his corporate-takeover players. Subsequently, Ovitz noted with quickening interest the decline and eventual demise of Drexel Burnham Lambert, which had been a dominant investment banker to the industry in the eighties. Drexel's muscle had been derived from its financing capability (it underwrote billions of dollars in junk bonds issued by entertainment companies), which Ovitz had had no way of matching, but now that junk bonds are out of fashion as a financing tool for an acquisition, Ovitz is admirably positioned to fill the advisory vacuum that Drexel left.

But that is bound to be only an interim move in the grand master's plan. In the aftermath of the Matsushita triumph, Ovitz, characteristically, was operating on many fronts. He made his début in New York, as he had determined to do about five years ago, when he decided that Hollywood was too small a stage for him. Morton Janklow and Arnold Glimcher hosted a party for him, and one of the guests, David Rockefeller, invited Ovitz to join the Chairman's Council of the Museum of Modern Art. During the week of the party, Ovitz lunched one day with the editors of the *Times*, and one day with those of *Forbes*. An acquaintance of Ovitz's commented that he was behaving like someone who was about to launch a political campaign, and added that there were some who wondered, in all seriousness, whether he might have his eye on the Presidency.

Even Ovitz's friends say that he has not shared with them his specific long-range goals. To know Ovitz, however, is to be almost compelled to speculate. One friend of his, Richard Koshalek, who is the director of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, told me, "I think we all tend to feel that we can only take on so much in our lives. Michael Ovitz is one of the few people I have ever met who feel they have no limits. Really, none."

And when I remarked to Ovitz that the deal had been, for him, an amazingly apt culmination of his longtime interests and labors, he immediately took exception. "I don't see it as a culmination," he said. "I see it as a plateau." —Connie Bruck

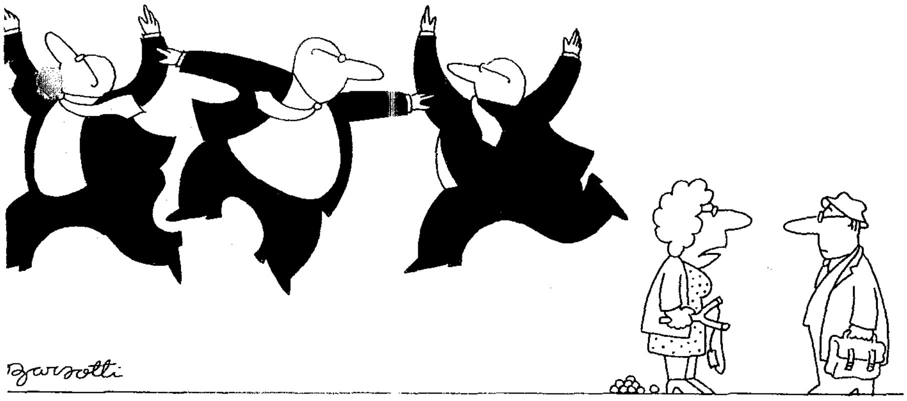
# THE THEATRE

## *Goodbye, Dolly*

THE Roundabout, reverting, sad to say, to its old form, is presenting a slack, dim-witted production of Thornton Wilder's "The Matchmaker," a farce so wise and sharp and funny that one would think it couldn't lose. Not a bit of it. Some facts first: the play, under the title "The Merchant of Yonkers," first opened in New York in 1938, and failed; revised and retitled, it reappeared in New York in 1955 and was a great success, with Ruth Gordon in the leading role of Dolly Gallagher Levi, who, agreeing to find a wife for one Horace Vandergelder, a rich old widower of Yonkers, manages with infinite subtlety to snap him up for herself. (Of course, it also reappeared as the source of the musical "Hello, Dolly!," which ran forever.) I saw "The Matchmaker" in 1955, and though I realized at the time that Miss Gordon was a marvel, who embodied all the author's humor and mischief and zest for living, I didn't realize that she was indelible: even now her voice and her readings echo through the show.

The action, which is as intricate and elaborate in plot and business and settings as Wilder's "Our Town" was bare and simple, moves from Vandergelder's house in Yonkers to various spots in this city—a milliner's shop, a fancy restaurant, and a spinster's house—and the principal characters include Mr. Vandergelder's two put-upon clerks, the milliner he is meant to be courting, and her assistant. There is also a complement of waiters and coachmen and other servants. The time is just after the turn of the century.) The play itself is a celebration of life and its infinite possibilities, minute by minute, for surprise and adventure and joy. (The word "wonderful," justified for once, is repeated over and over.) It requires a performance as firm and disciplined as Mr. W.'s glorious shenanigans; it also requires actors who are worthy of the parts he has written for them and, above all, an alert and sensitive director who can keep things clear and on the move. The direction at the Roundabout, by Lonny Price, is a sluggish disaster. Since many of the actors have good credentials, I see no point in naming them in this gloomy context, except to say that Dorothy Loudon's Dolly never comes to life. As a matter of fact, I'd be tempted to skip the show were it not for the dandy performance of Jim Fyfe as Cornelius, the elder of Vandergelder's two clerks. He is the romantic lead, and he is so good, so lively, so on target that he would have been at home onstage with Miss Gordon—and Eileen Herlie and Robert Morse. (What a company!) Every time Cornelius speaks, or even appears, we are snapped back into the play from somewhere in dreamy boredom. I also enjoyed Lisa Dove as the droll, bespectacled assistant milliner. The settings—often screens and painted cloths that move quicker than the eye—were admirably designed by Russell Metheny and lighted by Stuart Duke; the costumes, which include any number of beguiling hats, were admirably designed by Gail Brassard.

—EDITH OLIVER



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# THE CURRENT CINEMA

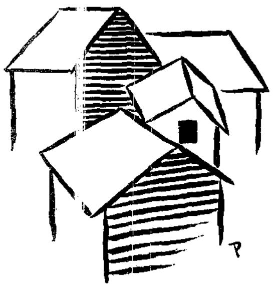
## *Showoffs*

THE Coen brothers' "Barton Fink," a macabre comedy about a blocked writer in 1941 Hollywood, is densely packed with allusions, clever dialogue, ingenious visual jokes, startling plot twists, and imaginative atmospheric effects, yet it feels thin. It's an empty tour de force, and what's dismaying about the picture is that the filmmakers (Joel Coen directed, Ethan Coen produced, and they wrote the script together) seem inordinately pleased with its hermetic meaninglessness. The Coens started out, in "Blood Simple" (1983) and "Raising Arizona" (1987), as genre-movie parodists and cynical wits—smart-alecky connoisseurs of trash. But in "Barton Fink," as in last year's "Miller's Crossing," the Coens appear to be taking their lack of seriousness seriously: they've become nihilist showoffs. The new film, which won the top prize at the most recent Cannes Film Festival, is the story of the disillusionment of a left-wing New York playwright, Barton Fink (John Turturro). On the strength of one successful play, called "Bare Ruined Choirs," he's offered a contract to write screenplays for Capitol Pictures. He goes to L.A., checks into the seedy, depressing Hotel Earle, has a meeting with the head of the studio—a fat vulgarian named Lipnick (Michael Lerner)—and then tries to settle down to work on his first assignment, a wrestling picture for Wallace Beery. Understandably, Fink has a hard time finding anything to inspire him in this project; he sits in his hotel room, stares morosely at his typewriter, and feels defeated. For some reason, the studio hasn't provided him with an office, so Fink and his stalled imagination are at the mercy of the thick, rotting ambience of the Earle: no sunlight or street noise ever seems to penetrate his solitude, but strange voices from adjoining rooms reach him with disconcerting clarity; the ornate, faded wallpaper keeps peeling off, and viscous paste drips down toward him; the staff consists of an ancient elevator operator and an ominously overeager desk man; the corridors are silent, deserted, and impossibly long, and the camera tracks along them slowly, as if to savor their voluptuous creepiness.

The setup of "Barton Fink" is tantalizing. The combination of the cheap, overdrawn Hollywood satire of Fink's initial scene with Lipnick and the luxurious horror-movie mood of the hotel scenes is potently weird. And the absurdity of the hero's situation has nice comic possibilities. Even the Coens' shameless movie in-jokes have, at first, a pleasantly disposable quality: the movie begins with a parody of a famous shot from "Citizen Kane," which was released in 1941; the twisty, berserk dialogue in the Lipnick scene plays like an homage to Preston Sturges, whose 1941 comedy "Sullivan's Travels" was about the uneasy relationship between social consciousness and Hollywood entertainment; and the hotel sequences explicitly recall Stanley Kubrick's "The Shining," whose monstrous protagonist is a man driven insane by his inability to write. There's no real weight to any of these allusions. They're sly, intricately constructed jokes, with delayed-action punch lines; if you get a Coen gag, you feel smart, but if you don't you haven't missed anything important. The minor amusements of the first twenty minutes or so of "Barton Fink" don't last, though. At a certain point, the filmmakers' playfulness begins to make us uncomfortable, because the Coens seem to be flaunting their facility and their lack of conviction, using them to ridicule the values of the movie's intense, idealistic hero.

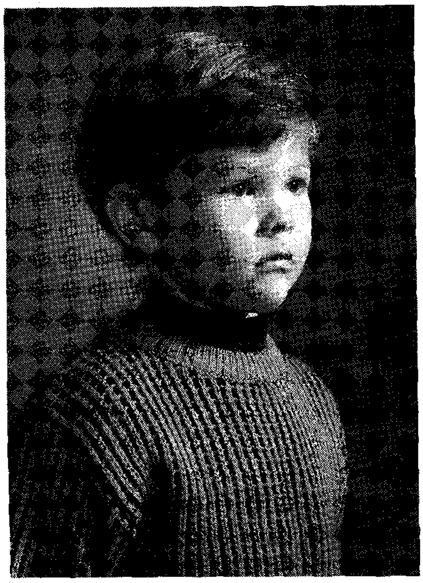
The political fervor of writers like Clifford Odets, upon whom Barton Fink is obviously based, is easy enough to make fun of. The plays that Odets wrote in the thirties for the Group Theatre (the most well known are "Waiting for Lefty" and "Awake and Sing!") are awkward, untidy mixtures of Chekho-

vian melancholy and agitprop speechifying. His language, which is a heightened rendering of Depression-era slang, sounds dated, and his ideology, which is founded on the hope that oppressed workers would liberate themselves through collective action, now feels naïve. But Odets wasn't a phony, or a buffoon, or a talentless hack. Barton Fink is all those things, and the Coens treat this emblematic figure of thirties culture with merciless contempt. The movie is designed to visit ever more grotesque indignities on a character who's pitiful from the outset, and there's not much fun in that. At first, Fink seems merely a wimpy, distracted intellectual, a head-in-the-clouds type who's easily befuddled by the bluster and vigorous pragmatism of men like Lipnick. But when Fink starts trying to write the Wallace Beery vehicle, he comes across as a fraud, too—not even enough of a professional to bang out a routine B-movie script. And then the film exposes him as a self-absorbed poseur: in his first conversation with his next-door neighbor, an affable insurance salesman called Charlie (John Goodman), Fink condescendingly refers to his new acquaintance as a "common man," and launches into a didactic rant about politics and theatre, ignoring Charlie's every attempt to get a word in edgewise. This pompous jerk Fink, we're given to understand, is interested in the common man only as an abstraction; with the real thing sitting three feet away from him, he'd rather lecture than listen. It's at this point that the humor of "Barton Fink" starts turning sour. For the rest of the picture, the Coens devote themselves to the project of punishing their hero for his fatuousness, his incompetence, his intellectual vanity. It's a cruel exercise, and the glee with which the filmmakers invent torments for Fink is disturbing. The idea seems to be that Fink, the monastic theorist of social realism, needs to have his nose rubbed in some unpleasant realities. The Coens' notion of reality, however, is as abstract as their hero's idealized conception of the common man. When the movie gets violent and ugly, the gruesomeness is less shocking than simply alienating. Joel Coen's smooth, precisely choreographed, decorative camera style gives even the most horrifying events a high gloss; the movie makes its argument, proceeds from its hypothesis to its conclusion, with the polished, haughty manner of a professor delivering a lecture that he's been trotting out for years.



In effect, the Coens, whose interests are purely academic, take it upon themselves to convict and sentence their protagonist for the crime of isolation from the real world. Or perhaps Barton Fink deserves his comeuppance solely on the basis of taste: it's gauche to proclaim belief, in anything. "Barton Fink" is just a joke, a game with the audience, but bad faith curdles the humor, and the Coens set things up so that the last laugh—a dry, knowing one—is theirs. Their prankish formalism becomes very irritating in the course of this picture. The style of "Barton Fink" is all curlicues and embellishments: we feel as if we were sitting in a bleak room and staring at the intricate patterns of the wallpaper. (At times, Joel Coen's baroque technique—his meticulous arrangement of overhead shots and zooms and blackouts and tracks in and out—achieves the insufferable elegance of Alain Resnais.) And John Turturro, who is in every scene, performs in a style that matches the filmmakers', gimmick for gimmick. His Barton Fink is the most fanatically detailed caricature of a nerd since the heyday of Jerry Lewis. The way Turturro plays this leftist intellectual, the movie might as well have been called "The Nutty Pinko": he gapes and blinks and stammers and contorts his body into ungainly poses, and his mouth never seems to close. Like the Coens, he's an inexhaustible inventor of bizarre, arresting shtick. And his inventions, like theirs, are essentially pointless and diversionary—doodles in the margins of a page with no text.

Maybe the best way to understand the Coens—to put their intellectual agility and their fundamental coldness in perspective—is to think of them as jaded graduate students amusing themselves by working up rarefied, wittily erudite interpretations of their favorite authors. "Miller's Crossing" is like a de-luxe, annotated edition of the collected works of Dashiell Hammett. "Barton Fink" seems to be trying to give the same treatment to Nathanael



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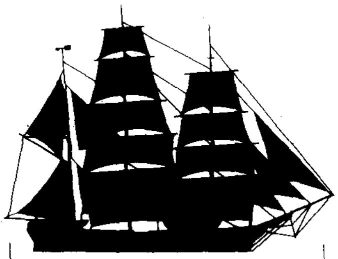

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West, whose short, ferocious satiric novels were published in the thirties, the time of Odets' greatest success. It's not a by-the-numbers pastiche, as "Miller's Crossing" is, but neither film does justice to its source. West's novels—"A Cool Million," "Miss Lonelyhearts," and "The Day of the Locust" (which is set in Hollywood)—are strange fables of innocence and corruption, in which naïve heroes are invariably crushed by the world's pitiless indifference to their good intentions. West presents the defeat of his hapless innocents with swift, cruel humor, which makes him seem more modern than someone like Odets; there's nothing inspirational, or even vaguely hopeful, in Nathanael West. But there is in him, as in all genuine satirists, a core of moral outrage. His protagonists are *true* innocents, not highbrow fakers, and we sense his anger that these poor fools are destined to get ground into little pieces by the harsh social machinery of Depression-era America. What the Coens give us in this picture is a version of West in which the style has been refined (West's was brisk, clipped, and inelegant) and the sensibility has been coarsened. "Barton Fink" is just a fancy metaphysical splatter movie, and it's unsatisfying in every way. There's nothing at stake in the filmmakers' systematic dismantling of their hero and all he stands for—except, perhaps, their desire to demonstrate their superiority to the ethics and aesthetics of an earlier time. (Even Faulkner, in the guise of an alcoholic Southern novelist played by John Mahoney, takes his licks from the Coens.) It's tempting to imagine the response of Clifford Odets to the Coens' smug, preening jokiness. The first line of his first play, "Waiting for Lefty," would do nicely: "You're so wrong I ain't laughing."

THE murder mystery "Dead Again," directed by Kenneth Branagh from a wildly complicated script by Scott Frank, is a much more entertaining exercise in high-style inconsequentiality. This movie wears its inanity on its sleeve. It shuttles breezily between the present day, in which an L.A. detective named Mike Church (Branagh) is trying to discover the identity of an attractive amnesiac (Emma Thompson), and the late forties, in which a European composer and conductor (also Branagh) may or may not have murdered his pianist wife (also Thompson). These stories are, of course, connected. The amnesiac has nightmares in which she sees herself as the murdered pianist, and later, under hypnosis, she visualizes a detailed narrative of the events leading up to the crime; both Mike and her hypnotist (Derek Jacobi) are forced to consider the theory that this mysterious, anonymous woman is a reincarnation of the conductor's wife, stabbed to death with a pair of scissors more than forty years earlier. It's a juicy premise, and Branagh makes no attempt to disguise its preposterousness. He seems to revel in it, both as actor and as director. He cuts blithely from the contemporary sequences (which are in color) to the forties sequences (which are in black-and-white) and back again; he tries to dazzle us with speed and gaudy patter, like a magician doing card tricks. "Dead Again" has a lovely mood. It's both frivolous and spooky, and the suspense often seems a function of sheer giddiness: as the movie dances, with drunken insouciance, toward the simultaneous climaxes of its two stories, the tension we feel is partly fear that Branagh won't be able to maintain his precarious balance.

Finally, the picture does come crashing down, in a heap of unresolved enigmas. When it comes time to wrap up the mystery, "Dead Again" gives us a solution that consists of the unmasking of the killer and a big fight scene, and Branagh's insouciance loses its charm. In murder mysteries—unlike magic acts—we want to know how the tricks were done. In the end, Branagh's approach to the genre seems negligent, insultingly cavalier. Throughout, he has toyed affectionately with mystery-fiction conventions and old-movie style, and his dash and flair have carried us along. (He brings a crazy enthusiasm to such stock genre scenes as the detective's moment of revelation: when the truth dawns on Mike Church, Branagh mugs and gasps as if he were Oedipus discovering that he's killed his father and married his mother.) But in failing to make even a gesture toward explaining away the plot's many implausibilities and absurdities he casts a bit of a pall over the reckless fun that the movie has given us. It's as if he were telling us that he has just been slumming all along.

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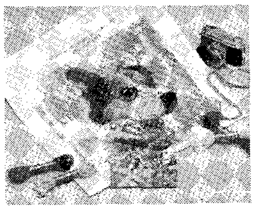

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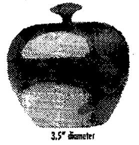

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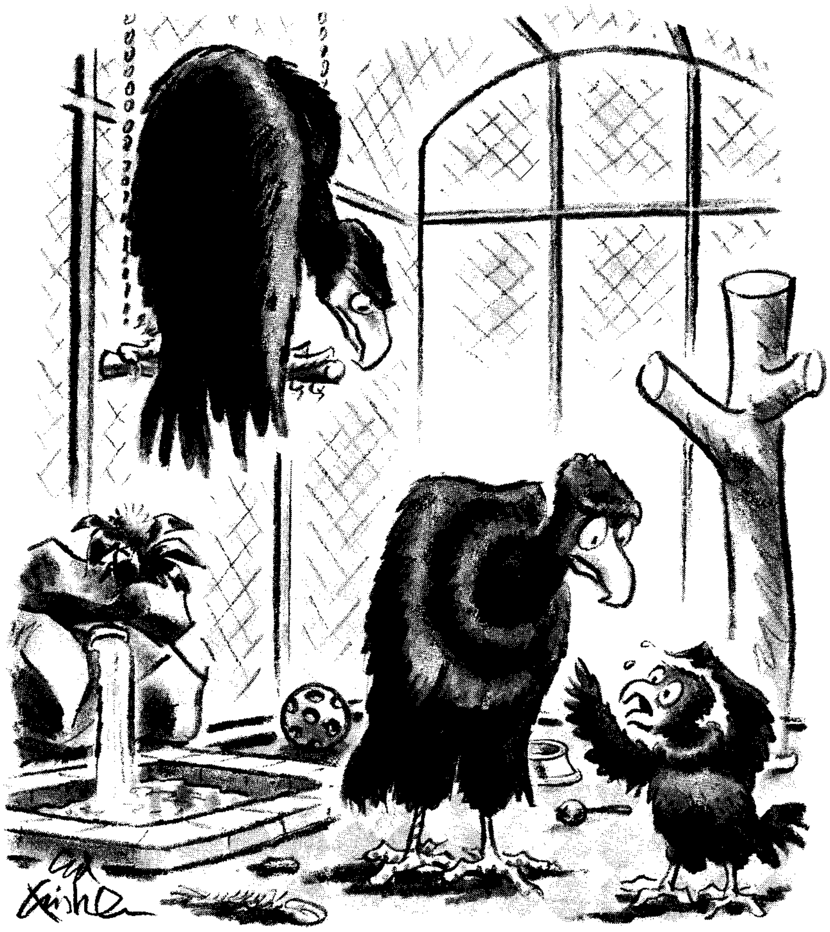
# LETTER FROM HONG KONG

THIS territory of nearly six million residents is currently operating with a budgetary surplus of more than five hundred million American dollars—no one has threatened to turn off any of *these* street lights—but something may well be awry with its fêng-shui. Fêng-shui, which translates as "wind-water," is the ancient Chinese form of geomancy: it has been defined as "relations to the surrounding nature, the influence of the landscape on the beauty of the buildings and the happiness of the inhabitants." Those practicing it are said to be "adjusting physical surroundings to enhance positive energy flow." There are fewer fêng-shui masters in the Hong Kong classified telephone directory than there are astrologers or fortune-tellers, but they seem to have retained a greater hold over modern Hong Kongers, and even Western expatriates, than these other practitioners have. The opening of the Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation building in 1985 was postponed until its ground-floor escalators were repositioned according to fêng-shui principles. Geomancers are routinely consulted here on office and interior design, and several years ago staff members of the Hong Kong Legal Department hung mirrors in their offices to send back bad fêng-shui that they suspected was coming at them from the office of the United States Consulate General, nearby. (Apparently, this precaution was insufficient: the senior crown counsel has since been convicted on a morals charge, and two of his senior deputies have been arrested in another case.)

Fêng-shui is also bound up with political and zoning issues in much of Hong Kong's New Territories, an area encompassing the hilly landmass between the Kowloon Peninsula and the Chinese border, together with two hundred and thirty-five islands. One Sunday last May, in Central District, which is Hong Kong's downtown, I came upon a procession of more than four hundred demonstrators from the New Territories, bearing hand-drawn banners. "THE VILLAGERS OF PAT HEUNG OBJECT TO BUILDING A BAD FÊNG-SHUI" said one—it was translated for me by one of the parade marshals, a young man carrying a portable megaphone—and "FIGHT FOR OUR RIGHTS FOREVER UNTIL OUR DEATH" said another. Those in the procession ranged in age from children barely able to walk to a score who were in their seventies, and possibly in their eighties, and as they shuffled along they shouted "Fêng-shui!" much in the manner of the crowd at an American football game chanting "Dee-fense!" The young parade marshal identified himself as Lai Wing Tin and said that he was a primary-school teacher. I fell into step with him, and he explained the reason for this protest while the parade wound through Central, past the Legislative Council, the Hilton Hotel, and St. John's Cathedral (where, at the request of their police escorts, the chanters briefly fell silent), through the compound of principal government offices, and up to the back gate of Government House, where a letter of appeal to Governor David Wilson was received by a police guard.

Most of the Pat Heung villagers were descendants of the Lai family, Lai Wing Tin told me, and they were protesting the construction of a columbarium—the villagers call it an "ash house"—adjoining the tomb of their ancestors. "Until now, the government has honored our tradition—that no one who is not a Lai can be buried on our land," he said. "But now, without saying anything to us, somebody is putting up what ads in the Chinese press say will be the biggest cemetery in East Asia."

Lai Wan Cho, the Pat Heung resident who handed in the letter at Government House, doesn't speak English, but he told me through an interpreter that he was a retired restaurant owner and a member of the Pat Heung Rural Committee, and that he was amazed to find himself, at the age of seventy-three, involved in his first public protest. "I've never been to Government House before," he said. To Ko Leung, a salesman of chemicals, echoed these sentiments. "We're not the kind of people who go protest, ever," he said. "I never imagined that we could be doing anything like this. It shows that our people are really angry." The columbarium, a complex of two dozen three-story buildings, was being constructed on a site bought



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from a villager who had recently emigrated to Australia. "He's a Lai," Lai Wing Tin told me. "He wouldn't have sold the land to them if he knew what they were going to use it for."

To oppose the project, the villagers had collected donations of ten thousand Hong Kong dollars (U.S. $1,285), part of which went to commission a fêng-shui master to survey the site. His finding, according to Tsang Kam Wah, another of the protest leaders, was that "people will die, the birth of sons will decrease, and our luck will be seriously spoiled by this construction." In the five weeks since the completion of the survey, demonstrators said, as many as ten of Pat Heung's twenty-five thousand residents had died. After leaving their letter of protest at Government House, the marchers boarded chartered buses for the ride home, and I was invited to return with them to see the site and look at the fêng-shui report for myself.

Pat Heung actually comprises twenty-six villages, clustered eleven miles north of Hong Kong Harbor, at the foot of Tai Mo Shan, a thirty-one-hundred-and-forty-four-foot peak that is the highest mountain in Hong Kong. The construction site is just south of a two-lane highway that partly bisects the New Territories. Near Pat Heung, on both sides of this road, are a number of small automobile and container scrap-yards. "First, the village people sold land to people from the city, who built bungalows on it," said one of the villagers who escorted me to the site. "Then, when the bungalow people moved away, the scrap-yard people came." The site is also only a short distance from a British military airstrip and from Shek Kong, one of the largest of Hong Kong's detention centers for Vietnamese boat people (or migrants, as the government prefers to call them). I asked whether these were not also bad fêng-shui, and the answer was that they were, but that "at least they're temporary, and remedies can be found for them, but the ash house is permanent." Lai Wing Tin's sister, Ecco Lai, who is a Hong Kong University student, pointed to a waist-high concrete stupa, or traditional Chinese tomb, just beyond the construction site. "There is the grave of our ancestors, and this project is directly in the way of the fêng-shui between it and most of us in the villages," she said. "All these ghosts will lie in the way of the Lai ghost, who protects his offspring. He will not be able to fight against that many ghosts by himself."

Because it was Sunday, no work was taking place on the columbarium buildings, which were rising behind bamboo scaffolding. A hundred-foot-long entrance path called a Spirit Way—a re-creation of the avenue to the Ming tombs, outside Beijing, which is lined on both sides by sculptures of warriors, elephants, and mythical animals—had already been completed. Half a dozen policemen guarded the site from a group of perhaps fifty villagers a few yards east of the entrance, most of them elderly women who themselves appeared to be guarding a small wooden altar heaped with offerings of fruits, nuts, and burning incense. From one of these women Tsang Kam Wah obtained a scroll, which he unrolled to reveal a map and the written report of Ho Yuen Yuen, the fêng-shui master. "What he has outlined here, from the head to the tail, is the dragon protecting Pat Heung," Tsang said. "What they are building over there will break our dragon's head, and if our dragon dies the effects will be felt even beyond our villages"—here he circled his arm over his head to indicate the entire Territory of Hong Kong—"within forty-nine days from April 14th, the day he did the survey."

The Pat Heung dragon may yet survive. Villagers were turning out every day to attempt to block access to the site. A week after my visit, they chased away thirty-four students of a fêng-shui institute who had volunteered to survey the site as an academic exercise. Construction of the columbarium was suspended just before the arrival of the forty-ninth day, which was June 2nd; and in the early morning of June 10th fifty-nine men said to be newly hired construction workers—although they lacked tools and were not dressed in work clothes—were arrested and led from the site in handcuffs. Representatives of Pat Heung charged that the men were members of a criminal triad, and that they had menaced the villagers with pick handles and burned their small altar. So far, construction remains at a halt.

I'M not a believer—yet—in fêng-shui, but the survival of the Pat Heung dragon past June 2nd was followed in a week by a break in the spring drought that had brought Hong Kong's reservoirs down to twenty-two per cent of their capacity—a ten-year low. Through the end of May, when our rainy season begins, the Territory had received slightly less than thirty per cent of the expected rainfall of twenty-four inches, and although more than eleven inches fell in July the government may still have to ration water later this year. Even with average rainfall, Hong Kong has not been able to satisfy a three-per-cent annual increase in water demand, and as much as seventy per cent of the two and a half million cubic metres of water used here every day has had to come from China's Guangdong Province, which, of course, suffers from the same drought and has had to shut down two hydroelectric plants so far in order to maintain levels in the reservoirs supplying Hong Kong. This year's quota of water for Hong Kong was fixed at more than five hundred million cubic metres; the water is paid for, at the rate of about eighteen American cents per cubic metre, but it should still be noted that China, in its many disputes with the Territory, has never threatened (at least publicly) to turn off the tap.

On June 4th, it was disclosed that the People's Republic had agreed to furnish Hong Kong with an additional seventy million cubic metres of water in 1991. The timing of the announcement was no doubt deliberate. June 4th is a date with extraordinary resonance for this Territory as well as for China, and the enormous numbers of people taking part in demonstrations in Hong Kong commemorating the second anniversary of the massacre at Tiananmen Square indicate that the passing of another year has not dulled the intensity felt here about that terrible event. On June 2nd, a Sunday, twenty thousand people marched from Central to the Xinhua News Agency, China's de-facto embassy; it was the largest such demonstration in any country that day. On the eve of the anniversary itself, both as a reporter and as a participant (I was in Beijing two years ago and do not claim to be professionally detached from what I witnessed there), I joined approximately seventy thousand Hong Kongers in a three-hour candlelight vigil in Victoria Park. A stage had been constructed in a corner of the park, and although I was some three hundred yards away and don't speak Cantonese I had no trouble un-

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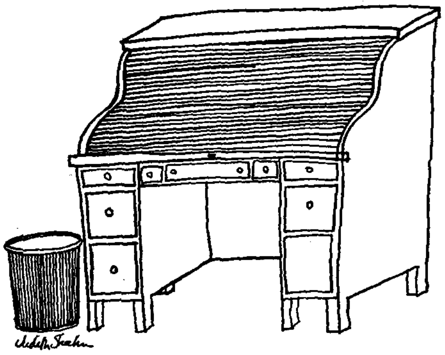
derstanding the pantomime—in one episode, black-garbed "stagehands" swaddled and muffled a speaker for freedom in bolts of red cloth and bore him away—or what the local press later described as the "sombre music and patriotic songs." Several of the singers tried to get the audience to join in, but these Hong Kongers, many of them dressed all in white to signify mourning, were not a sing-along crowd. Most of my fellow-participants politely applauded the speeches of the leaders of Chinese dissident organizations, but it seemed to me that they had come not to demonstrate against China but simply to show solidarity with those who had been imprisoned, or worse, for speaking out there. I was glad to be with them, to add one more candle to the pictures in the world's press showing that Tiananmen has not been forgotten here.

China's agreement to supply more water stands in contrast to its position in more than two years of negotiations with British and Territorial officials over a project to construct a new airport on the island of Chek Lap Kok as a replacement for overcrowded Kai Tak, and to make extensive harbor improvements. Although the new airport was planned for completion before July 1, 1997, when Hong Kong reverts to China, the bonds required to finance at least part of the U.S. $16.3 billion estimated cost will extend beyond then, and China considers the project one of the political "straddles" requiring its approval under the terms of the 1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration on the Territory's reversion. Hong Kong's negotiators have handed over to their Chinese counterparts forty-seven engineering studies indicating that Chek Lap Kok is the least expensive and most feasible airport alternative. (Although these studies are still nominally classified, Philip Bruce, the project's chief information officer, assures me that a fêng-shui survey is not among them.) China's objections, however, have focussed on the more practical question of how much debt will be outstanding on the bonds in 1997, and how much money will remain in Hong Kong's reserves to pay it. Britain originally declared both these questions to be solely within its purview, but in early July it agreed to turn over to China in 1997 at least U.S. $3.2 billion in reserves, and to grant the People's Republic veto power over any airport debt exceeding U.S. $641 million at the time of the turnover. The Bank of China has also been promised a part in the bond underwriting and a seat on the new airport's governing board.

Another of the straddles that trouble the People's Republic, one which is so far unresolved, is the proposed establishment in 1992 of a Court of Final Appeals, which is intended to replace Britain's Privy Council as the Territory's ultimate judicial authority; judges here have lifetime tenure, so those appointed to it by the British governor can be expected to serve long after 1997. Still another is the relocation of Britain's naval base from high-priced real estate in Victoria Harbor to an island off Kowloon. The difficulty in this instance is not so much where the British put their base (which in any case they will have to leave in 1997) as how the proceeds from the sale—estimated to reach U.S. $1.8 billion—will be divided. The Sino-British Joint Declaration calls for an even split of the proceeds of land sales between the Territory's present government and the one to be established after 1997. However, if the sale of the Victoria Harbor site takes place after that date, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of China will keep the whole amount.

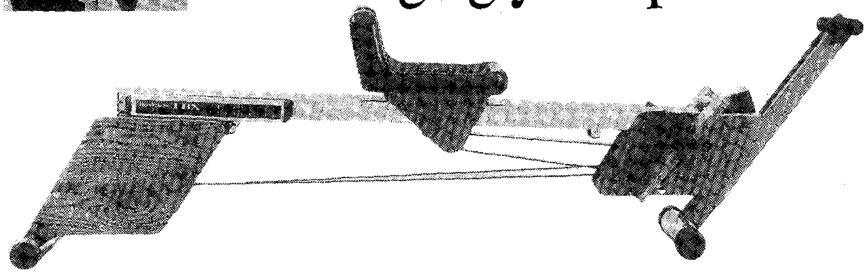
The first week in June was also when President Bush made his recommendation to Congress to continue "most favored nation" status for China. ("Most favored nation" is a double misnomer. Not only are all but a dozen or so nations in the world considered "most favored" but those developing countries to which the United States extends a "generalized system of preferences" on tariffs are more favored than the other "most favored.") It is probably just as well for the peace of mind of many Hong Kong businessmen that there have been no fêng-shui surveys on Capitol Hill, where Congress has just approved extending this status but with stringent human-rights conditions it knew would be unacceptable to China. The President, who headed the United States liaison office in Beijing in 1975, before diplomatic relations between China and the United States were formally restored, has said he intends to veto such conditions, and then the question will hinge on whether Congress can override his veto.



China has lost its M.F.N. status before—in 1951, after it entered the Korean War. The status was not restored until 1980, a year after the reëstablishment of diplomatic relations. In the decade since, its annual trade surplus with the United States has risen to more than ten billion dollars, and that surplus has been predicted to increase to thirteen billion in 1991. Those who would deny M.F.N. to China, however, say that they are motivated less by the trade imbalance than by the dismal record of the People's Republic on human rights: oppression in Tibet; the stiff sentences imposed on some seventy dissidents accused of attempting to "overthrow the socialist order" in and around the time of the Tiananmen demonstrations; and the possible sale—in violation of American law—of prison-made products (which a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman concedes could have occurred). In response, the President, in announcing at a Yale University graduation address in May that he had decided to seek M.F.N. renewal, said that it would be "wrong to isolate China if we hope to influence it," and added, "We will not be able to advance our cause or resist repression if we pull back and declare that China is simply too impure a place for us."

Hong Kong, which is America's tenth-largest trading partner ("Quite an accomplishment for a city-state three-fourths the size of New York City," the United States consul-general, Richard L. Williams, likes to point out), is caught in the middle of this dispute, since it is the source of an estimated U.S. $11.5 billion in investments in some fifteen thousand Chinese corporations. The Territory would also lose its profit from the transshipment, in both directions, of almost seventy per cent of Sino-American trade. Last year, according to the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, Hong Kong shipped goods valued at U.S. $1.3 billion to China and sent Chinese goods valued at eight times that amount to the United States. Sir Piers Jacobs, the Territory's Financial Secretary, estimates that a cutoff of M.F.N. would cost Hong Kong between nine billion and twelve billion American dollars annually, and between thirty-two thousand and forty-three thousand jobs. In their efforts to retain M.F.N. for China, both President Bush and Chinese Premier Li Peng have played Hong Kong cards. "The economic interests of Hong Kong and other regions will be seriously jeopardized; China does not want to see that happen," Li warned a visiting delegation of American businessmen in May, and President Bush, in his Yale address, said that withdrawing M.F.N. from China would "deal a body blow to Hong Kong, the bastion of freedom and free trade in the Far East."

Its role of bargaining chip in the transactions of the great nations of the world with China is certainly in keeping with Hong Kong tradition. In Washington, though, the bargaining chip was left to play the hand. "Maybe it's better for China if it doesn't lobby," Dr. Robert Sutter, a senior specialist in international policy with the Congressional Research Service, told Hong Kong reporters by telephone at a May press conference at the United States Consulate General, explaining that Chinese diplomats who attempted to lobby "would have to get into convoluted explanations of why they are building a reactor in Algeria or selling arms abroad." Delegations from the Hong Kong General Chamber of Commerce, the Hong Kong American Chamber of Commerce, and the Hong Kong Trade Development Council along with the Territory's own baroness, Lady Lydia Dunn, who is the senior member of the Governor's Executive Council, all visited Washington, but Congress proved to be less receptive to the Hong Kong issue than it was during last year's M.F.N. debate. Among the reasons were America's growing trade deficit with Hong Kong itself (last year the Territory exported nine and a half billion American dollars' worth of goods to the United States and imported goods worth six billion eight hundred million from it); attempts by Hong Kong legislators to mandate the repatriation of the Vietnamese boat people, a step that the United States opposes; and recent disclosures that four mainland pro-



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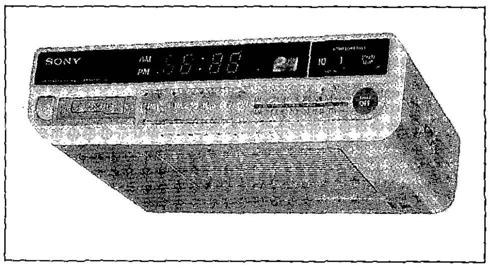

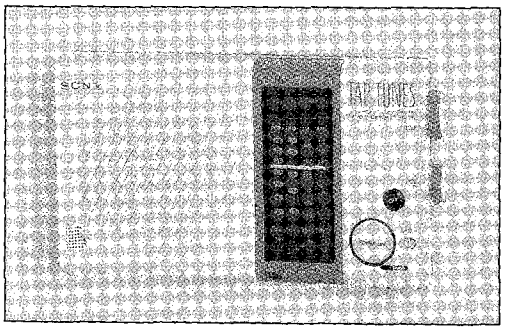

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democracy dissidents who fled here after Tiananmen had been sent back. (Two were jailed; they were released in July, and have returned to Hong Kong. There were reports that the other two had been executed; China denies the reports and says that this case is still "under investigation.")

Despite China's treatment of its dissidents, there are those here who make what might be called a relativity argument in favor of retaining M.F.N. "You have to understand where China is coming from," Mrs. Nellie Fong, a member of the Legislative Council, told me recently. "It's a country that puts people in prison for much longer terms for small offenses—theft, for example. In the past, political offenses were unforgivable, and if you understand what China is, you'll see that these dissidents were let off lightly." Mrs. Fong, a partner in the international accounting firm of Arthur Andersen and the supervisor of its offices in Beijing and Shanghai, maintains that, from her perspective, China is improving. "I've worked there twelve years, and the policy of 'Opening to the Outside World' has made an enormous change in the country," she said. "If you say that that isn't good enough, aren't you imposing your own guidelines on China—telling it what is serious and what is not? But, beyond that, I think that the United States should consider what it was trying to achieve when it gave M.F.N. back to China in 1980. I thought that M.F.N. was given to help countries develop, and to create an environment for international investment and trade. If you can say that there has been improvement in the People's Republic—and I really believe there has been, despite Tiananmen—isn't that what you were striving for?"

It was outside the scope of our interview, but I asked Mrs. Fong if she was planning to stay on in Hong Kong after 1997.

"Sure," she said. "I have a Western education, and a British passport, which carries the right of abode in Britain, but I will stay here and try to remain in the government. I do have to learn to understand the Chinese better—and I make this admission as someone who is Chinese and who works in China. Hong Kong has been promised autonomy, but if people believe that it will be the autonomy we have under the British, they will be disappointed. I think that the Chinese government will influence Hong Kong, and Hong Kong will have to learn to become a part of China and prove how useful to it we can be."

Mrs. Fong is not regarded as one of the "pro-Beijing" politicians—those said to have adopted, in the language of the Hong Kong *Standard*, "an understanding and friendly stance towards the Chinese authorities." Two years ago, at the time of Tiananmen, such a stance would have meant political ostracism or worse, but since then antagonism toward China has cooled to the point where candidates are again willing to accept support from parties that acknowledge themselves to be "pro-China." (In the arcane political lexicon of Hong Kong, they are among the "conservatives.") Xinhua, which represents the interests of the People's Republic here, does not publicly endorse individual political candidates, but it does express a degree of support for political organizations it considers sympathetic, and has allowed its officials to be photographed at those organizations' social functions. Recently, it attempted to go further than this and found itself in the situation—anomalous for a Communist organ—of issuing a public statement on behalf of an organization of landlords. The issue was legislation sought by the government and opposed by the landlords' organization, Heung Yee Kuk, to control the spread of scrap yards and container dumps like the ones I noticed on my visit to Pat Heung. The suggestion of a Xinhua spokesman that such a land-use regulation would somehow violate the Sino-British Joint Declaration was brushed off by the Hong Kong Legislative Council.

Legco (pronounced with a soft "g" and a hard "c"), as the council is popularly known, is the most formal deliberative body whose proceedings I've ever witnessed. Members, upon entering and leaving, bow to the chair, which is usually occupied by Governor Wilson. The Governor has the power to disapprove of any of Legco's acts, but he hardly needs to do so, since "government members," who work under him as civil servants, and members appointed by him constitute a

*"Just hear me out, then tell me I'm wrong."*

majority. Few bills are ever defeated in Legco; if the Governor disapproves of them, they are normally amended into innocuousness. Fortunately (in my view), this was the fate of a recent measure that could have resulted in the termination of Hong Kong's role as a "port of first asylum" for the Vietnamese boat people, who are still landing here in great numbers; nearly two thousand arrived in July alone. The Marine Department reported less than two months into its financial year that it had already spent all the money budgeted for burning their boats. The government has estimated that it will spend about U.S. $77 million on the support of Vietnamese here this year and expects to be recompensed for only about a third of that amount by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. The birth rate in the ten detention centers is almost keeping pace with the rate at which new arrivals are "screened out"—that is, denied refugee status. Even more exasperating to many Hong Kongers was the discovery that some of the latest migrants were making their second trip. If the port-of-asylum policy had been revoked, the Marine Police could have been instructed to tow arriving boats back out to sea, leaving their occupants prey to pirates, drowning, or dying of thirst. To their credit, the policemen let it be known that they would refuse to obey such an order. I wondered whether some of the legislators who accused the government of "catering" to the boat people, furnishing them with "excellent food and clothing" and allowing them to "live without working" had ever inspected the rows of squalid quonset huts behind barbed wire where Vietnamese are confined until they agree to return voluntarily to Vietnam or are resettled elsewhere. I found it ironic that debate on this issue took place at the same session that saw the passage of an American-style Hong Kong "Bill of Rights"—a measure that a People's Republic spokesman says may be revoked after 1997.

SADLY, though, it is true that—as some members of Legco pointed out—there are Hong Kongers who live in worse conditions than the boat people, and probably eat less well. Like other cities, Hong Kong has a population of homeless, who fashion shelters out of cardboard cartons and sleep in doorways, on traffic islands, and sometimes on pedestrian overpasses, but such places may be preferable as residences to some of the Territory's "tolerated squatter settlements"—shanties perched dangerously on many of the Territory's hillsides. Thousands of other Hong Kongers live aboard cramped fishing boats tied up side by side in foul typhoon shelters, or in triple tiers of thirty-six-cubic-foot "cages," renting for a little over U.S. $16 a month, in Mong Kok and other crowded commercial districts. I have toured Stanley Prison, the Territory's maximum-security institution, and I judged the cells there more habitable than these cages.

Almost as depressing accommodations—typically of no more than three hundred square feet—are occupied by the remaining residents of the notorious Walled City of Kowloon, an enclave of six and a half acres that was once known as the most densely populated area in the world. The Walled City is being cleared now—it is to be torn down next year and replaced by a park in 1996—but in 1987 thirty-three thousand residents were counted there, along with a thousand industrial and commercial enterprises, in five hundred buildings of up to fourteen stories. Historically, the Walled City is an anomaly. In 1898, when Britain leased the New Territories from China, it was a disused fort that had become the seat of a local magistrate, and China reserved jurisdiction over it. The exception was unilaterally revoked in London in the same year, but because the Chinese never consented to this the site retained vestiges of extraterritoriality. Before 1960, for example, criminals captured in the Walled City were deported to China rather than prosecuted in Hong Kong, and until recently more than a hundred and sixty unlicensed practitioners of Chinese medicine and dentistry were permitted to practice there, unchallenged by regulatory authorities.

The Walled City has no elevators and no running water (and no wall around it, for that matter; there hasn't been one since 1943, when the Japanese dismantled it for granite to extend the runway of Kai Tak Airport, which adjoins the enclave), but several of the Chinese dentists were still practicing there not long ago, when a companion and I visited it. The Walled City is not a place that I would want to explore alone. Its buildings are only

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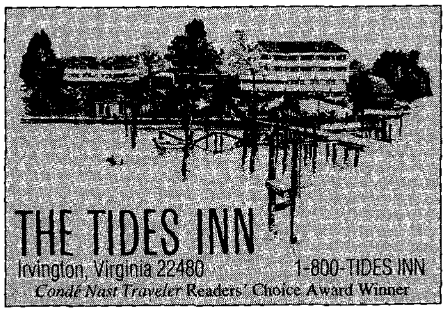
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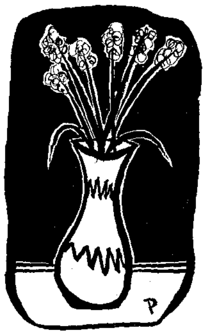
two or three feet apart, so the "streets"—filthy hallways with street signs, really—are not wide enough to permit two pedestrians to walk abreast, and they are so overbuilt with terraces and building extensions that they resemble tunnels dripping with tangles of wires and cables. Most of the people we encountered and squeezed past in these alleys were young adults; there were also several hand-holding couples and one little girl in a somehow immaculate white dress, who was toddling along in pursuit of a yellow cat negotiating the cables. We followed the turns toward the center of the "city," passing a few grocery stores, a shop that sold musical instruments, several establishments turning out *jouza* (filled dumplings), a plastics factory, three or four furniture-making and woodworking shops, and a restaurant, where games of mah-jongg were being played. Every few feet, flights of steps led up to apartments that, from the evidence of overflowing mailboxes, had already been vacated. We also noted signs indicating the departure to more suitable quarters (or so I certainly hope) of a Norwegian Lutheran Church mission, a school, and a day-care center. Eventually, we made our way to the *yamen*—the old house, in the middle of the city, that was once the magistrate's court. Wire fencing blocked access to it, but the most notable thing about this building was probably a rope net strung above it to catch the garbage that rains down from the apartments above.



Hong Kong real estate is extremely expensive—a recent survey calculated typical monthly mortgage costs at more than eighty per cent of the income of an average family—and consequently nearly half the population lives in public housing, where rents run about a third of the market rates. Ultimately, the tenants of the Walled City and the cages in the commercial quarters can look forward to being resettled in concrete-walled flats, allowing some thirty square feet per adult, in a hundred and forty-four "estates"—mammoth apartment buildings of twenty stories or more, some of which offer only communal cooking and washing facilities. However, even these apartments seem luxurious compared with a residence I visited in a block of huts—one of seventy-seven "temporary housing areas" that accommodate people waiting for flats in the estates—on Tsing Yi Island. This was a forty-four-square-foot concrete cubicle, with a sleeping loft accessible by ladder. Its assigned residents are two worker priests, Fathers Franco Mella and Franco Cumbo. They were relocated to the area two years ago along with thousands of their former neighbors, who had been living on fishing boats in the Yau Ma Tei typhoon shelter. Both priests are members of the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions, which has reassigned Father Cumbo temporarily to Italy, so Father Mella rattles around alone, for a rent of about U.S. $18 per month, in the Tsing Yi hut, which he considers an improvement over his former accommodations. "At Yau Ma Tei, there was no electricity, and we had to buy clean water, because it was so polluted there," he told me. "We used to teach the children on boats that were so small that we couldn't stand up. For a few years, they let us teach at the Yau Ma Tei primary school in the evening, but in 1983 they took that privilege away from us, because, they said, we were teaching the kids not only Chinese but to fight for their rights."

Father Mella, who is forty-two, says Mass at one or more Hong Kong churches on Sundays, but he doesn't usually wear a Roman collar, and he holds a six-day-a-week job as a packer in a garment factory. When I first encountered him, last Christmas, he was spending his holiday outside Victoria Prison on a solitary nine-day sit-in on behalf of one of his supporters, who has been imprisoned in China for the past nine years on a charge of counterrevolutionary activities. "This isn't as hopeless a case as you might think," he told me on that occasion. "Last year, four of us went to Shanghai to ask for the release of a student, and he was released two months later."

"But why pick a prison in Hong Kong to demonstrate for someone held in jail in China?" I asked.

"Because this is where this government holds accused illegal immigrants," he said. "I also want to call attention to the thousands of Chinese women who have come here to give birth. The fathers are Hong Kong citizens, but the mothers are forcibly separated from them and from the kids, and deported."

Father Mella is also active on behalf of the ten thousand fishing families who he estimates still live on boats in the Territory's harbors—"the government has promised to resettle them all by 1994, and we'll be watching to see that it does"—and among his other endeavors are a shelter he operates in Mong Kok for eighteen homeless men, and the coördination of "about thirty pressure groups."

"Is there a cause you haven't found time for?" I asked.

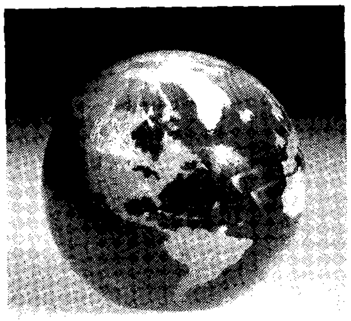
"Well, I worked on the boats for ten years, and I converted only two families to Christianity," he said. "And then one of them joined a Protestant church."

In his factory job, Father Mella earns a salary equivalent to little more than U.S. $19 for an eight-hour day, and a meal ("which is very important here," he pointed out). When I asked how his fellow-workers regarded him, he said, "The first priests came here to work in the nineteen-sixties, and I guess at first the Chinese thought we were crazy, but if you speak their language"—and he does, fluently—"they forget you're a foreigner and treat you like any other worker. Changing jobs is very common here—this is my thirteenth in fourteen years—because factory workers get no benefits and no pensions. When people find work that pays better, or is easier to get to, they just quit. Or sometimes they go to work one day and find that the factory has moved, or closed down."

Or, as occasionally happens, someone shows up for work to find that he or she has been replaced by a contract worker from China eager to work at less than the prevailing wage. A machine factory recently replaced, without notice, workers earning U.S. $578 a month with immigrants from China hired on contract at U.S. $411. The displaced workers had the support of a union, but, because there is no requirement that employers bargain collectively, unions here function primarily as social and political organizations. Workers who try to organize job actions have a difficult time of it. Last March, ninety-nine housekeeping employees called a strike at the Mandarin Oriental, one of the city's five-star hotels (the issue was a disciplinary caution issued to two of them); seventy soon applied to return, but only twenty-four were taken back. There is no minimum wage in Hong Kong, and no social-security retirement insurance, either. There is, however, a dole for "needy individuals," along with monthly old-age supplements beginning at U.S. $44.

Among the few other benefits that Hong Kong offers low-income workers are an income-tax structure that exempts families earning less than ten thousand American dollars (and single people who earn half that), and the absence of a general sales tax—although the government is hinting at imposing a wholesale sales tax. The annual budget relies heavily on so-called sin taxes on alcohol and tobacco, and in May cigarette taxes were increased two hundred per cent, doubling the price per pack to U.S. $3.08. Sir Piers Jacobs told Legco that he had formulated this increase "with a particular view to reducing the attractiveness of smoking to young people," and in the month it stood it surely had that effect on their elders as well, since it put the cost of a daily pack of cigarettes at about fifteen per cent of the average Hong Kong salary. Legco, at Sir Piers' request, cut back the increase to a hundred per cent as soon as its effect on the inflation rate—and potentially on wage rates—was perceived. Cigarettes are an important component of the consumer price index, and most salaries here, both in the civil service and in the private sector, are linked to this measure of inflation, which in April of this year stood at 13.9 per cent—the highest annual rate recorded in the past decade.

Workers may not be organized here, but employers are, in trade organizations that constitute some of the "functional constituencies" of Legco, and members of these groups who break the prevailing wage patterns, no matter how badly they need the labor, are liable to be accused of "poaching" workers—or dealt with more punitively. Two years ago, when the Marriott Hotel, then about to open, recruited staff workers by offering an unheard-of five-day week, rival hotel managers succeeded in barring it for a time from membership in the Hong Kong Hotels Association (and thus from the association's 1989 and 1990 listings guide), and one hotel manager charged the Marriott with violating the Sino-British Joint Declaration's agreement to coöperate



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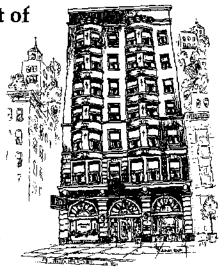

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in the interest of Hong Kong, arguing that "changing the work week could seriously damage our stability and prosperity."

The Marriott kept the five-day work week, and, although Hong Kong's stability and prosperity appear to be unshaken, the Territory's hotels, in particular, are now having a problem keeping workers: a trade publication recently calculated the average annual job turnover in the industry at fifty-six per cent. Unemployment has also become a problem, but the concern here is not that the rate—just under two per cent—is too high but that it is too low; this could renew poaching, which, in turn, could increase salaries and possibly damage the Territory's reputation for cheap labor. In 1988, when unemployment dropped to 1.4 per cent, the average manufacturing wage rose eighteen per cent, and salaries in the service sector also rose eighteen per cent. The response to this was the institution of a "special scheme" that last year permitted employers to import twelve thousand seven hundred workers annually. Now that the unemployment rate is again below two per cent, the government says that it is considering raising this quota. The help-wanted section of the *South China Morning Post* runs at least once every week to more than a hundred pages of display and classified advertisements, and a few of these—an increasing few—are headed "5 DAYS WORK."

—FRED C. SHAPIRO

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[*From the Irish Times*]

SIR,—Teagasc runs the College of Horticulture in the ICA buildings at Termonfeckin, Co Louth. This is a residential third level institution with an important role to play in the development of a skilled pool of horticulturalists for the Irish industry.

I know, therefore, that many will want to join me in congratulating the college on its decision to suspend three students last month. Two girls were found drinking tea in a boy's room at 9.30 pm. These students may be as young as 18 or 19 years of age and it is vital that they be taught a severe lesson now if we are to have mature and responsible horticulturalists for the 90s and the next century.

Such social mixing must be avoided at all costs and this, indeed, was a blatant breach of regulations which absolutely forbid such fraternisation. Happily there are now regular patrols of the boys' corridors to ensure that is not repeated.—Yours, etc.,

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# PHOTOGRAPHY

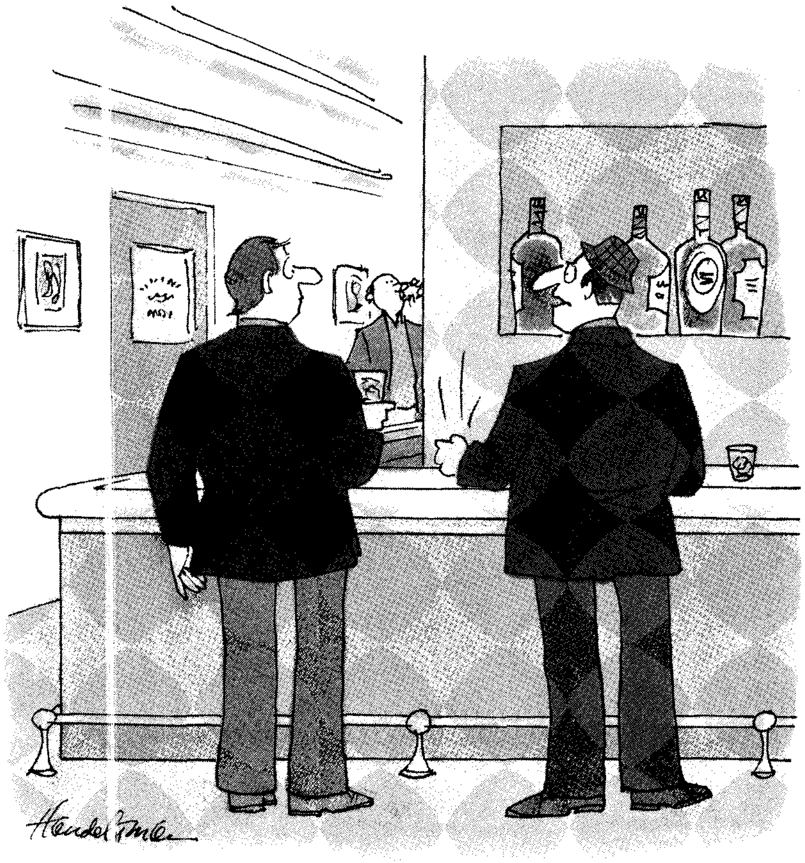
## *Good Intentions*

Sebastião Salgado is the photojournalist of the moment. His reputation has been on the ascent, and although the heyday of photojournalism is past, his career proves that there is still a hunger for the kind of social-documentary picture stories that flourished in magazines in the thirties, forties, and fifties. In a relatively short time, he has had a number of books published, his images have been used prominently in major news stories, and there have been heavily publicized exhibitions of his work. He has, in fact, had two shows this year, only six weeks apart, at New York's International Center of Photography. In the spring, the uptown branch of I.C.P. housed Salgado's travelling retrospective "An Uncertain Grace," which originated at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; and this summer at I.C.P.'s midtown branch one could see "Kuwait Epilogue," an exhibition of his shoot of oil-well firefighters in Kuwait, done right after the Gulf War, and, in another room, his photographs of gold miners in Brazil, many of which had just been on view in the retrospective uptown.

It's rare for a photographer to be as widely trumpeted as Salgado. And it's rare—even rarer today than it was in the past—for a working photojournalist's pictures to be shown in a museum. That limiting, fragmenting system which divides people who use the medium into categories—fine-art photographers or commercial photographers or news photographers—may have had many exceptions and challenges over the years, but it's still firmly in place. No matter that, for instance, a photographer's imagery is highly inventive, and stands on its own: if it was originally produced on assignment, he or she is still pigeonholed as "less" than an artist, and has a harder time being taken seriously than someone whose pictures are first seen in an art gallery. Salgado's photographs, though, have been welcomed in a variety of milieus. They are generally the result of self-assigned projects, and they look as carefully composed as still-lifes. Indeed, this "art" quality has contributed greatly to the work's success as photojournalism-plus-much-more.

"Kuwait Epilogue" underscored how bright a spotlight there is on this photographer, while confirming that there's something exaggerated about all the attention he's getting. The Kuwait pictures are mostly stagy shots of men at work, trying to cap the gushing wells, or at exhausted rest. But they constitute an expression of Salgado's ongoing interest in manual workers—for the last few years, he's been involved in a project called "The End of Manual Labor"—more than they constitute a narrative of what happened to Kuwait's landscape in the Gulf War. There's no deep observation of the place and its new scars. The oil that's such a looming presence in the photographs and that appears to cover everyone and everything identifies the series as a product of the war, but the images add no special meaning to the sense of ecological devastation transmitted over the wires while the war was going on—something they seem to be striving to do. Salgado's portraits of the firefighters are remarkably similar to his portraits of gold miners; the firefighters just happen to be covered with oil, not mud.

What stood out most about this exhibition was its promotional tone. Two press displays were installed in Plexiglas boxes, one showing spreads from the issue of the *Times Magazine* in which the Kuwait images first appeared, and the other containing an appreciative article on Salgado, from the same issue. You don't come across press clippings as an installational element at many exhibitions. It could be argued that there's interest in seeing Salgado's Kuwait images in their original photo-essay format, but why display the article on the photographer? It's a piece of feature journalism about his life and his work which, though it covers his time in the Gulf, is the type of background article that usually stays in the background, separate from an actual presentation of the work. Just imagine what it would be like if curators regularly displayed magazine articles on artists as part of their exhibitions—a show, say, of Jasper Johns' paintings and, with it, his press clippings. Nor was this the only place in the I.C.P. exhibition that hinted at a collapse of the usual separation between curatorial practice and publicity. Salgado's biography, installed on a placard, ended with something more like an after-dinner speech than like



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an educational device: for the years 1988 through 1990—years in which Salgado did a great deal of work—all it cited was a list of awards.

It makes sense that the International Center of Photography is enthusiastic about Salgado's pictures, which are clearly trying to echo the endeavors of the group now referred to as "concerned photographers"—the group whose humanistic mission was the inspiration for I.C.P.'s founder and director, Cornell Capa, who is the brother of Robert Capa, a hero in the field. (Cornell Capa, in fact, is credited with coining the term "concerned photography," and Robert Capa was a founder of Magnum, the prestigious agency of which Salgado is a member.) Yet I.C.P. isn't exceptional in its fanlike attitude toward Salgado's work. From the tone of other recent Salgado projects, including the texts that are part of his books and shows, it's clear that neither he nor his admirers believe his photographs to be anything short of acts of enlightenment, and great pictures to boot, the premise being that they bestow honor on the people in them. Included in this claim is the suggestion that the images are powerful enough to change perceptions. The cult of appreciation that has developed around Salgado sets him up as a photojournalist whose pictures have a transforming power over, say, ethnocentrism, racism, and classism. From Salgado's choice of projects, from his titles, and from the photographs themselves, it appears that he aspires to be a spokesphotographer for forgotten people and also for soon-to-be-lost ways of life—a worthy ambition, but one, unfortunately, that resists the oversimplified yet heavy-handed means by which he attempts to achieve it.

Salgado's subjects are often so weighty, and are so weightily presented, that it is inevitable that his work has come to be credited with weightiness. It's no coincidence that his images of starvation, and of other situations in which human beings undergo intense physical stress—such as slogging in and out of a barren mine—are the ones that have brought him the most notice; subjects like these embody matters of conscience and, by their very nature, pull at the emotions. But other photojournalists have photographed such subjects. It's Salgado's manner—his visual rhetoric—that has given his work so much clout. His compositions, crops, lighting, angles, and toning stand in sharp contrast to the usual lack of insistent style in photojournalism. He goes in for aura. What's more, many of his photographs suggest both religious art and the kitsch products resulting from the commercialization of religion. Salgado is given to including cross-like forms in his pictures, for example, and all too frequently he presents people in a way that implies a connection to saints, martyrs, and various other figures familiar from Judeo-Christian iconography. It is work that is sloppy with symbolism. And his religiosity seems to be catching. At times, a curator's or a commentator's partisanship can become so extreme that it feels as if the artist's work is being worshipped instead of examined. You can see this happening in the exhibition "An Uncertain Grace," and it's there in the book of the same title, which was published last year, by Aperture, when the show opened.

"An Uncertain Grace" is a package deal, with basically the same format, plus or minus a few images, at each museum where it appears. (It is now at the Chrysler Museum in Norfolk, Virginia, and will eventually be seen at San Diego's Museum of Photographic Arts; at Washington, D.C.,'s Corcoran Gallery; at Harvard's Carpenter Center; and at the North Dakota Museum of Art, in Grand Forks.) The photographer's proponents may make claims for the power of his pictures, but the presentation of this show doesn't reveal much faith in the viewer's ability to grasp what Salgado is doing without help and hype. The captions that accompany the photographs have an inflated, pseudo-educational tone, and the introductory wall label, written by Sandra Phillips, of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, who conceived of and organized the show, begins this way: "Sebastião Salgado, a Brazilian by birth, is probably the most important contemporary Latin American photographer and one of the most important artists in the Western Hemisphere." No faint praise here. There's something off-key about the lionizing of the "artist" that informs "An Uncertain Grace" (both the show and the book) when one considers Salgado's subjects—particularly the people in the Sahel region of Africa, whom he has photographed, it appears, in order to convey the effect that famine has had on them. The photographs of these people have been fostering discussions of courage, but not the courage of those who really deserve recognition for it. It is Salgado eryone seems to end up admiring—for getting so close to such suffering. (You also hear people discussing the Sahel photographs as if what mattered were whether or not they themselves had the courage to look.)

At I.C.P., "An Uncertain Grace" was installed so that before you got to the photographs of starvation and death in the Sahel you came upon a statement from the American branch of the French aid organization Médecins Sans Frontières telling you that the group was "proud to be associated with I.C.P. for this exhibition," and that Salgado's "humanitarian concerns parallel our own." No doubt, the doctors have great respect for Salgado and for his work, and there is plenty of evidence that he is serious in his efforts to help fight starvation. (For his most recent Sahel pictures he was working with the coöperation of Médecins Sans Frontières, and when the photographs were published as a book in France and Spain he donated the profits to it.) But his seriousness cannot eliminate the evident disparities—between claims for the work and what is actually there in the images; between intentions and results.

CERTAINLY, what Salgado is trying to accomplish is difficult to achieve. He wants his portraits from the Sahel to reveal the inhuman scale of the tragedy there, while also capturing the dignity of the people he is photographing. Furthermore, the images are supposed to work as educational vehicles, as calls to action. But this is the kind of endeavor that requires an El Greco or a Goya, and though Salgado is treated as if he were such a visionary, regrettably he isn't one. In the history of photography, there are many who have tried to use photojournalism to change the world as well as to capture it, and a few have had some effect. Others have simply been naïve—even deluded—about what they were doing. Still others are complicated mixtures of high aspirations and presumption. It seems to me that Salgado is one of these.

Salgado's imagery is often linked to the work of a photojournalist whose pictures include moments of brilliant humanitarian communication: W. Eugene Smith. Indeed, Smith's work has been a strong influence on Salgado, and the two men have much in common, most particularly their passion for making the world "see" injustice. Smith's photographs of war-ravaged Saipan and Okinawa, of the leper colony where Albert Schweitzer worked, and of the mercury-poisoned Japanese fishing town of Minamata are among the projects of his that remain a touchstone for many who practice concerned photography. Smith took photographs you can never forget once you've seen them, and he also took pictures that were heavy-handed and hackneyed. But Eugene Smith is his own story, and its usefulness to viewers of Salgado's work lies in something that Smith once said: "I frequently have sought out those who are in the least position to speak for themselves. By accident of birth, by accident of place—whoever, whatever, wherever—I am of their family. I can comment for them, if I believe in their cause, with a voice they do not possess." Such presumption is at the core of what is self-aggrandizing about Salgado's photography. To quote Smith again, in a moment of clarity about his work (and he had moments that went in the other direction) he described his camera and film as "the fragile weapons of my good intentions."

Salgado is working in a time very different from Smith's. As has frequently been remarked, the advent of television—with the resulting loss of mass-circulation magazines committed to supporting and publishing photo essays—has meant that photojournalists have few outlets today; there is no way they can compete with television in terms of immediacy or the public's attention. And in responding to the remaining magazine opportunities, they do not have the same sense of authority they had a few decades ago. Even though they never had real control over the presentation of their images, at least back then there was a healthy editorial demand for what they did. That has changed, and so has the way

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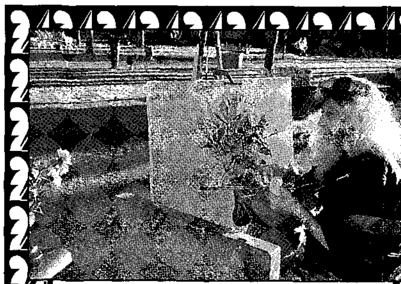

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photographs are viewed. For instance, we, today's audience, know that pictures can "lie," and, like the photographers themselves, we assume that magazines can use pictures to slant things. Meaningful photojournalism today requires an appetite for challenge, a belief in the power of the medium, and an internal alarm system against stereotyping. For the first two of these, Salgado deserves credit, but his work suggests that his consciousness of the deeper issues of representation in this kind of photography—such as how one's approach can skew things or how the subjects themselves might feel about being "honored"—is only partly developed.

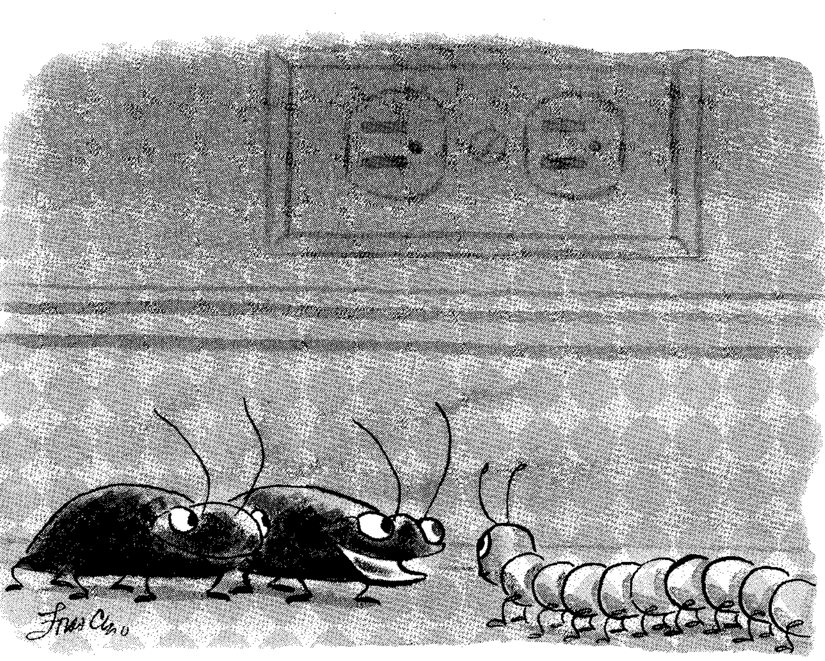
Still, it's tricky to unravel what is meretricious about his work, because it's all so uncompromisingly *serious.* His dedication to making people visible whom powerful institutions—governments, say, or the media—have typically ignored is strong, and he is aware of how the image of "the victim" can perpetuate victimization; he *features pride instead of its absence.* But often there is something else in his compositions: beauty. In fact, "beauty" is a word one hears a lot when Salgado's photography is discussed, and you can see why people respond to the formal beauty of his pictures. You can also understand and appreciate why he has chosen to challenge the usual clichés about poverty by underlining the beauty in its midst—he means to negate the revulsion that can take over when disease and hunger are on display. But beauty as a formula—and this is what it has become for Salgado—is as much *of a cliché as what he's trying to avoid,* and as artificial as any other blanket approach. A photographer can't lose with heart-wrenching subject matter like the situation in the Sahel: a fleshless child hoisted up in the air to be weighed; two sick-looking children sucking on breasts that look more like wrinkled pieces of leather than like oases of nourishment; a man bending over a child who has a skeleton's body and an old man's face. Getting our attention with such material is easy; what a photographer does with that material is what counts. Salgado is far too busy with the compositional aspects of his pictures—with finding the "grace" and "beauty" in the twisted forms of his anguished subjects. And this beautification of tragedy results in pictures that ultimately reinforce our passivity toward the experience they reveal. *To aestheticize tragedy is the fastest way* to anesthetize the feelings of those who are witnessing it. Beauty is a call to admiration, not to action.

SALGADO'S approach has inspired much laudatory writing, such as that by Fred Ritchin, who wrote the main text of "An Uncertain Grace," and who is the guest curator of the exhibition. Ritchin's expertise in photojournalism, as well as his long professional relationship with Salgado, which began in 1979, made him a natural choice for these tasks. His knowledge of the work is evident, as is his respect for it, but this very closeness to it seems to have forestalled an overview. To Ritchin, Salgado's use of Biblical themes is impressive, not pretentious, and so is the formalized beauty of the Africans. In fact, he makes a point of the contradictions between the look of the pictures and what's happening to their subjects:

> Fathers march for days with dying children draped across their arms. . . . *Children are weighed, suspended as if in the agony of the cross.* . . . There is an exalted beauty to the people—an emaciated boy using a cane stands nude before a withered tree on a carpet of sand, a woman with diseased eyes radiates a visionary sadness. A bruising conflict is created between the formal radiance of the imagery and their agonizing content as a proud, *attractive people suffers so.*

No question, Salgado's depiction of the woman with diseased eyes gives her an oracular presence. But the fact that her affliction has been turned into something spiritual-seeming is exactly what's disturbing about the photograph. Yes, *he's trying to counter the fear and* horror that her disease can cause others to feel: he's attempting to attract people to her plight—to involve us in it. And, yes, it's a "beautiful" photograph. But Salgado's strategy here fits into a long and convenient tradition of coupling human suffering and God's will. Finally, the photograph suggests that the woman's blindness is holy—in other words, that it needn't be seen as something to cure.

There is a widely felt yearning today for photography and art that *matter,* and Salgado's work has benefitted from it. But what do his pictures really succeed in doing? In a photograph of people in a refugee shelter in the Sahel, two young figures loom in the foreground, one sitting and the other slightly propped up. Salgado's



*"We had a great summer! Seven hundred and fifty thousand of us shared a house in the Hamptons."*

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perspective creates the impression that the viewer is close enough to touch the boy who is propped up: his elongated body and bald head stretch along the bottom half of the picture. His bone-thin legs are spread apart, and his shorts bunch around the tops of his thighs, which have a much smaller circumference than the shorts seem made for. Yet despite the sculptural image that he has become in Salgado's photograph, this boy is made of flesh, not wood. The shock of what he looks like is strong, but Salgado's objectification of the boy's body makes the image a setup—and, like most setups, it evokes reactions that are mechanical. Typical of the comments I overheard during several days of visiting the show at I.C.P. was one made by a young woman standing in front of the image: "I can't look at this picture. It makes me cry." Yet she looked at it, and she didn't cry. It isn't fair to make Salgado responsible for how we do or do not respond to the content of his pictures, but there are certain gimmicks and attitudes in them that seem designed to trigger specific reactions and reflexes that are insulting to the people being portrayed.

Ritchin explains Salgado's approach this way:

> It is a romantic view that he espouses, one that is loyal to the dignity of the person depicted while circumventing some of the complexities of his or her existence. But when one juxtaposes the images with their various contexts, the lyricism can become particularly searing—the fact, for example, that in the Third World 40,000 children die *daily* of diseases we in the industrialized world have learned to cure long ago, like measles and diarrhea.

The statistics about the children are an effective way for Ritchin to segue out of the issue of Salgado's romanticism, but they don't resolve the big problem with his work—the unrelenting application of the lyric and the didactic to his subjects. His is not photography in which the facts are allowed to sing for themselves, which is how Lincoln Kirstein once described Walker Evans' work. Evans' approach to photojournalism was the polar opposite of Salgado's. As Kirstein so trenchantly put it:

> The most characteristic single feature of Evans's work is its purity, or even its puritanism. It is "straight" photography not only in technique but in the rigorous directness of its way of looking. . . . It is also the naked, difficult, solitary attitude of a member revolting from his own class, who knows best what in it must be uncovered, cauterized, and why. The view is clinical. Evans is a visual doctor, diagnostician rather than specialist. But he is also the family physician, quiet and dispassionate, before whom even very old or very sick people are no longer ashamed to reveal themselves.
>
> There has been no need for Evans to dramatize his material with photographic tricks, because the material is already, in itself, intensely dramatic. Even the inanimate things, bureau drawers, pots, tires, bricks, signs, seem waiting in their own patient dignity, posing for their picture. The pictures of men and portraits of houses have only that "expression" which the experience of their society and times has imposed on them. The faces, even those tired, vicious, or content, are past reflecting accidental emotions. They are isolated and essentialized. The power of Evans's work lies in the fact that he so details the effect of circumstances on familiar specimens that the single face, the single house, the single street, strike with the strength of overwhelming numbers, the terrible cumulative force of thousands of faces, houses, and streets.

In general, Salgado's subjects are too much in the service of illustrating his various themes and notions to be allowed either to stand forth as individuals or to represent millions. He's a symbolist more than a portraitist—the people in his pictures remain strangers. It is true that what certain men, women, and children in the Sahel are suffering has overwhelmed them to such a point that they appear to be embodiments of hunger, thirst, and disease. Still, there are choices a photographer makes every time a picture is taken, and Salgado's strategies here consistently add up to aestheticization, not reportage.

WHILE the Sahel photographs stand out because of their distorted humanism, they constitute only one chapter of Salgado's work. "An Uncertain Grace" is divided into four main sections. There's a section titled "Diverse Images," a non-thematically grouped collection of photographs taken between 1974 and 1987 in Asia, Africa, and Europe. There's a group from the worldwide project "The End of Manual Labor," begun in 1986. And then, under the heading "Other Americas," there's a gathering of images taken in Latin America between 1977 and 1984. In these portraits from Ecuador, Mexico, Bolivia, Peru, Brazil, and Guatemala, Salgado is just as hooked on displaying his artistry in matters of composition as he is in his African pictures. But here it is the picturesque that dominates, rather than beauty. (Actually, the African work, too, offers a number of images in which one can see Salgado pursuing picturesqueness. A couple of the photographs from the Sahel aren't all that different from the chic desert shots in Bertolucci's ponderous film "The Sheltering Sky.") Some of Salgado's Latin-American photographs recall images made by others—Bravo, Penn, Sander, Arbus—and his attraction to the cross motif really gets a workout in this

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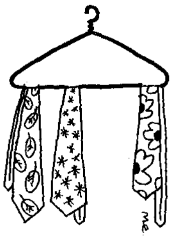
section. But at least here the religious content is appropriate, not dragged in, the way it is in the African work. It's still empty, though, because it's still formulaic. Taken as a whole, the "Other Americas" images—men in ponchos, a village wedding, a fiddler, bright-eyed kids—have that special Salgado weightiness; they're making points, but not very original or interesting ones. And in the group called "Diverse Images" there are shots very similar to the work of earlier influential photographers such as Cartier-Bresson and Robert Capa. A 1976 photograph of a soldier running in the Spanish Sahara is so close in feeling, if not in detail, to Capa's famous Spanish Civil War picture "Loyalist Soldier, Spain, 1936" that it almost qualifies as a remake. It's possible, even probable, that Salgado intended his picture as an homage, but he is not a postmodernist appropriation artist, so it's hard to believe that all his derivative works are intended as quotes—certainly, that's not how they've been presented.

"The End of Manual Labor" is perhaps Salgado's largest-scale *Gesamtkunstwerk* to date. It already includes photographs taken in Cuba, Bangladesh, India, the Soviet Union, North America, South America, and France, and apparently Salgado plans to shoot in forty or fifty locations eventually. From Ritchin's text it appears that "The End of Manual Labor" is conceived literally as an homage to laborers—he tells us that the project is "a paean to the end of an era before robots, electronics, and computers take over production." No wonder that in their earnestness some of these images would look at home in corporate annual reports, or the *Fortune* magazine of the thirties. Occasionally, the content of a photograph—such as pigs waiting in a slaughterhouse—leads one to believe that the project may turn out to be deeper than it seems. But that hope may stem from the over-all confusion in Salgado's work between what is actually present and what he intends.



Salgado himself seems to sense that there's more to his topic than celebrating the worker. Consider his alternative title: "The Archaeology of Industrialization." Nevertheless, unlike many works of art that deal with industrialization, Salgado's photographs are basically uncritical of its effects on human beings and on the environment. This is characteristic of his approach—it's his way of being "sentimental, nostalgic, heroic, lyrical," as Ritchin puts it. Such a romanticizing of this multilayered subject is almost breathtaking in its narrowness—particularly in the light of Salgado's supposed attunement to the lives of the powerless. His stiff photograph of a coal miner in India and his arty depiction of a silhouetted worker in an iron plant in the Soviet Union seem startlingly inadequate when looked at in the context of photographs that have been taken of subjects like these ever since industrialization went into gear. Compare Salgado's "Archaeology of Industrialization" with Lewis Hine's early-twentieth-century indictment of industrialization's inhumane use of lives. Hine was a photojournalist who did affect injustices: his photographs of children in factories and mills were so lucid and convincing that they can be credited with hastening the creation of America's child-labor laws. Salgado's work here, as in the Sahel, is too aestheticized, too caught up in itself, to fully acknowledge what's happening to others.

Within the workers series there is, however, one group of photographs that stun the viewer—the pictures of miners in Serra Pelada, in Brazil. Like the Sahel images, these have immediate power. They can evoke awe and horror, for they are of an immense human spectacle: thousands of men working a gargantuan gold mine. Visions of such waves of labor and physical exertion, of a mass of men so jammed together that their backs and sacks and legs look like a repeating pattern, are the stuff of nightmares and of wonder. But even these powerful pictures reveal Salgado's reliance on cliché. There's one shot, for instance, that looks like a gloss on Michelangelo's Sistine "Creation of Adam" and "E.T." 's appropriation of it. When I first went to the "Uncertain Grace" exhibition, I had just seen the film "Spartacus," and several of Salgado's other images recalled the more kitschy slave-crowd scenes in that movie. And his use of his favorite sign of the martyr and the miraculous—the cross—mirrors the climactic shots of Kubrick's movie, except that with

Salgado there is no Tony Curtis and no Kirk Douglas.

WHEN Salgado's admirers want to make the point that he understands what it is like to be outside the spheres of power, they bring up the fact that he lived in Brazil before moving to Paris. But since when did being a Brazilian qualify someone as the voice of Africa or of India—another assumption that creeps through the Salgado myth? A second aspect of Salgado's earlier life that buoys his reputation as a man deeply in touch with his themes is that he started out as an economist. Fred Ritchin explains in his text how Salgado made the transition from economics to photography: "It was while on a work assignment [for the International Coffee Organization] in Africa that he decided, on the basis of initial attempts with a camera he borrowed from his wife, that rather than work at the remove of a social scientist he preferred spending more time with the people he was drawn to, photographing them. He found that he could depict them more vividly in photographs than in economic reports." Vivid Salgado's photographs are, but the people in them, and the situations that he is supposedly penetrating, rarely are.

Actually, Salgado's most vivid image is one that is atypical of his work as it has progressed, and it's not about a subject that seems close to his heart. It's his "lucky break" picture: an on-the-scene shot of the attempted assassination of President Reagan. Salgado was tracking Reagan on an assignment from Fred Ritchin, who was then picture editor of the *Times Magazine*, and the famous photograph that he took in the instant after the bullets were fired is in almost every way the opposite of the imagery that has led to his current acclaim. It looks like something from a whodunnit movie: the image explodes with energy and action. The punch of the Reagan image comes from our realization that here is a figure of megapower made vulnerable before our eyes. The photographs that have made Salgado's reputation also have punch, but it comes from the pathos of the lives of his subjects.

And therein lies his power over the viewer. This is photography that runs on a kind of emotional blackmail fuelled by a dramatics of art direction. Salgado undoubtedly gets away with so much because of viewers' sympathy and guilt. What is more terrible than someone starving? What is more tragic than a dead child so thin that his or her body looks like a stick wrapped in a piece of cloth? Unless we have no heart, when we see such things something happens to us. The feeling can last for a moment, it can last forever; it can make us want to help, and it can make us actually help. Salgado's work has produced all these reactions, but I believe that this speaks more for the power of his subjects than for the quality of his work. Two photographs in the "Kuwait Epilogue" exhibition were almost identical—of a bird covered with oil, drowning in it, as it were, since the bird could no longer fly. We had seen such images during the war; in fact, one just like it, taken by someone else, became a symbol of the madness that the Gulf War was. It is in keeping with Salgado's approach to his work that he picked up on such a "button pusher" of an image. But the button pushing may not end there. Salgado used the phrase "paradise lost" in a caption he wrote to go along with one of the bird pictures—and both his image and his reference to paradise reminded me of the more kitschy aspects of Eugene Smith's work. Smith used the phrase "paradise garden" as a title for a photograph, one that ranks among his most famous—and schmalziest—images: two small children walk hand in hand, in a forest, their backs to the viewer. This is greeting-card stuff; it became the emblem of Edward Steichen's "Family of Man" exhibition, and has been reproduced countless times in advertisements and as a greeting card. Some of Salgado's photographs have appeared in postcard form; as yet, they haven't been reproduced as greeting cards. But who knows? The manufactured poetry that is so dominant an aspect of his aesthetic could turn the people in the Sahel into emblems on greeting cards for all of us who want to express our humanity. These photographs are less than their subjects deserve. We can be sure that if truly appropriate images should ever surface they will not be so "beautiful" that they could work as packaged caring. Salgado's sentimentalism, for all its earnestness, isn't any kind of breakthrough. Unfortunately, his champions aggravate the bullying quality of his work by presenting it as if it were the Second Coming. —INGRID SISCHY

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# BOOKS

## BRIEFLY NOTED

### FICTION

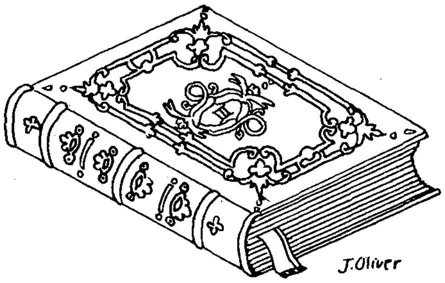
Ride a Cockhorse, by Raymond Kennedy (Ticknor & Fields; $21.95). As though suddenly snapping to attention, the formerly complacent widow and home-loan officer Frankie Fitzgibbons discovers the dominatrix in her forty-five-year-old self. She seduces an innocent high-school drum major, pampers herself with a sexy new wardrobe and daily makeovers at her doting hairdresser's, and rolls like a tank over her mild-mannered boss, virtually appointing herself chief executive officer of the bank where she works. Her newfound speaking style—long on pizzazz but short on truth—makes her a natural for publicity, and soon she appears on TV and in the newspaper as a blunt career woman who plans to crush other local banks with her no-nonsense policies. Business booms for Mrs. Fitz, but then the hilarious manipulations of the press and her superiors give way to a Fascistic reign of terror over her inferiors, and Mr. Kennedy has us pinned at precisely the point where the comic turns nasty; what began as a madcap charade becomes a suspenseful and not unsatisfying meting out of consequences.

All-Bright Court, by Connie Porter (Houghton Mifflin; $19.95). Being black, being Puerto Rican, being a black albino anytime from just after the Second World War until the aftermath of Vietnam is directly addressed as an issue in these interrelated vignettes of life among families come North to find work in and around the steel mills of Buffalo. The story is, in its way, familiar: at first, it seems a miracle to the migrants that they may work side by side with white people, make the same money, eat at the same greasy spoon, or live in houses with indoor plumbing. But, just as the patriarch of the piece, Samuel, felt that he had to escape the South, his clever son Michael, on scholarship at an exclusive prep school, feels he needs to escape the limited and still racially defined life of the black steelworkers' enclave, All-Bright Court. After he sees how his wealthy classmates live, indoor plumbing hardly seems miraculous. What there is no escape from is the pain of bigotry. Most poetic in the book is the language and the superstitions that he needs to flee—old Southern usages like "fenna" for "going to," rumors about a local "conjure woman."

### GENERAL

The French Foreign Legion: A Complete History of the Legendary Fighting Force, by Douglas Porch (HarperCollins; $35). An American historian who has written extensively about the French military takes account of the Legion as a source and a subject of machismo myths, but he is more interested in its role as a historical anomaly. By the time the Legion was founded, in 1831, Machiavelli's argument that citizen soldiers were superior to mercenaries had become broadly accepted, yet the Legion was a mercenary unit, and badly paid at that. How did it come to have the cohesiveness that combat requires, and what does its survival into the present tell us about the history of France and Europe and about the development of warfare? Mr. Porch works his answers to these questions into a narrative that conveys the discomforts of garrison duty and the excitement of battle. At one point, he writes of regarding the Legion with equal parts of "admiration, horror and ambivalence," and that will doubtless be the reader's response to the subject. As for the book itself, there can be only unqualified admiration for its thoroughness and intelligence.

J. Edgar Hoover: The Man and the Secrets, by Curt Gentry (Norton; $29.95), and From the Secret Files of J. Edgar Hoover, edited, with a commentary, by Athan Theoharis (Ivan R. Dee; $24.95). Hoover's biography begins like a Horatio Alger novel. His father, a low-ranking civil servant, had a nervous breakdown and was retired without a pension, so at the age of eighteen Hoover went to work in the Library of Congress, and attended law school at night. He never married, and lived with his mother, whom he supported, until he was forty-three. But soon the narrative sours: Hoover moved over to the Justice Department in time for the roundups of Wobblies and all alleged draft dodgers during the First World War, and went on to do his part in the Palmer raids of the postwar Red scare. He ran the F.B.I. from 1924 until he died, in 1972, caring for nothing except his own power and using every device from toadying to blackmail to enhance it. Mr. Gentry, an indefatigable digger, tells us what the director did day by day and year by year, and makes a great to-do about secret files that Hoover amassed—information gathered, for the most part, from wiretaps and bugs, many illegal. Some of the files have been destroyed; Mr. Theoharis's book prints excerpts from those which remain available, along with explanatory comments. The material reflects more shame on the spies than on the subjects; for example, a much gossiped-about sex scandal—John F. Kennedy's 1942 affair with a suspected spy—turns out to have been just a sailor's wartime romance.



### VERSE

The Book of Images, by Rainer Maria Rilke, translated from the German by Edward Snow (North Point; $25). Complete and in Rilke's chosen order for the first time in English, these eighty-odd widely various poems were written over seven years, from 1899 to 1906, but were arranged to read as if they had been written in one of the poet's famously fruitful months. In their matter they slide from his humming subsurface mysteries to hard, purely human paradoxes, and could almost be a bridge in verse between the prose works—"Stories of God" and "The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge"—that loosely bracketed their composition. Together the poems serve as a meditation on the urge toward and dangers of explicit speech—one danger being shame—in a world in which a man can be so gladly carried away. The translation is done in an easy, plain language that takes care not to interfere with the poet's pictures. Mr. Snow never strains toward rhyme or metre, but his way with Rilke's images—the astonishing blues and reds—is such that only rarely (in a semi-historical ballad, or in the song cycle "The Voices") does a reader think to miss the original music. An introduction, in which Mr. Snow regrets the inevitable loss of nuance, tells us just enough to give the book its context. A bilingual edition.

THE NEVER-ENDING, by Andrew Hudgins (Houghton Mifflin; $17.95). In his third book of poetry Andrew Hudgins concentrates on two traditional subjects—gardening and religious painting—but these spooky poems are neither pastoral nor devotional. The garden poems reveal a preoccupation with things like compost, creeping mold, and skunk cabbage, and the poems that describe paintings of Christ on the Cross focus obsessively on gory renderings of drops of blood and sweat. For Mr. Hudgins the art of the Resurrection is not about mercy but about manipulation. So is the art of poetry. Like any good Southerner (Mr. Hudgins is from Montgomery, Alabama), he is visited by ghosts—the familiar dead of family; the lynched; the still living—and he occasionally seems to speak as if he were a ghost himself, looking in on life from outside it. "Rebuilding a Bird," a poem exploring a fascination with taxidermy and "the red machinery / of meat," has the reader practically squirming by the end. Here, as in all the best of these precise, controlled poems, the tone is by turns furious and affectless, and the subject both elegant and grotesque.

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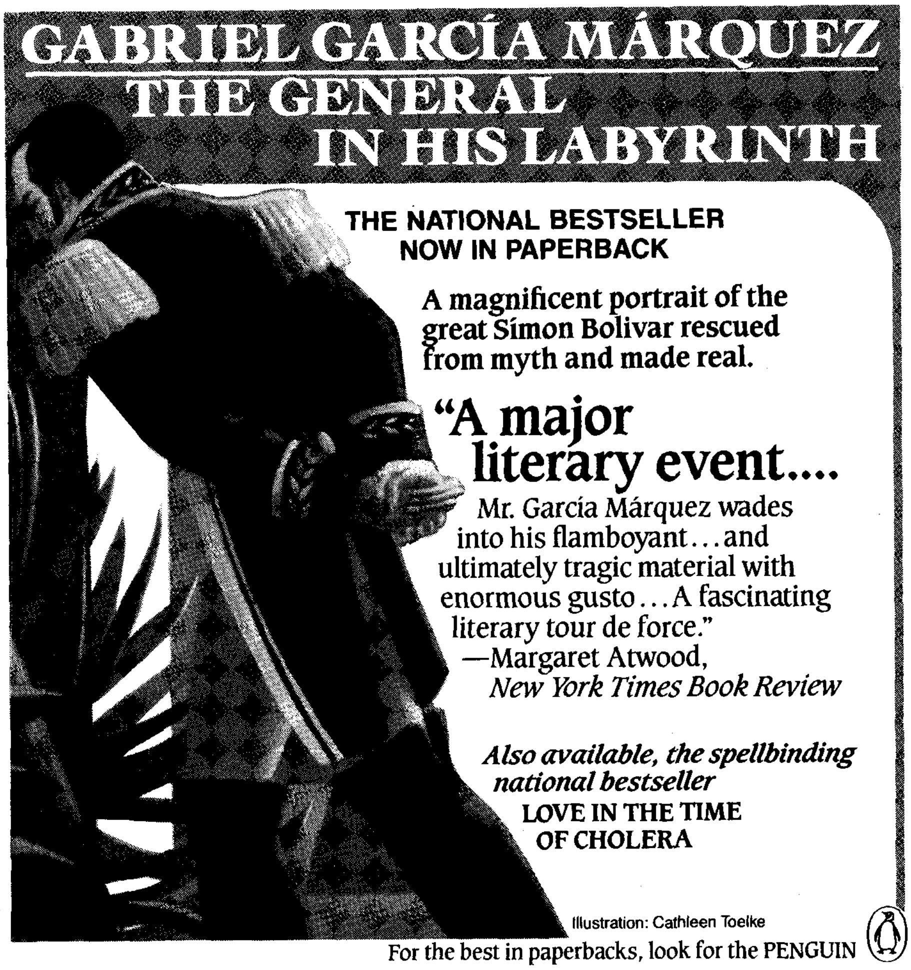
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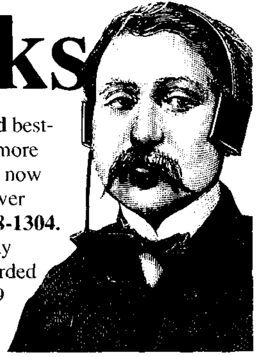
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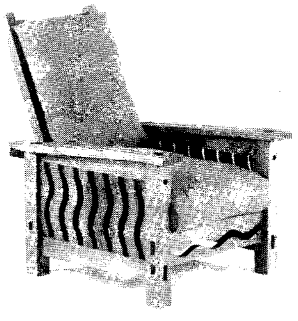
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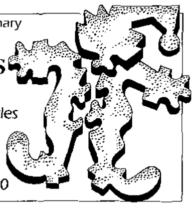
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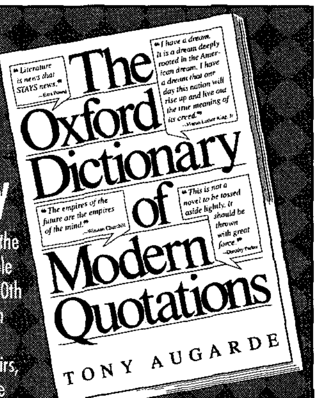
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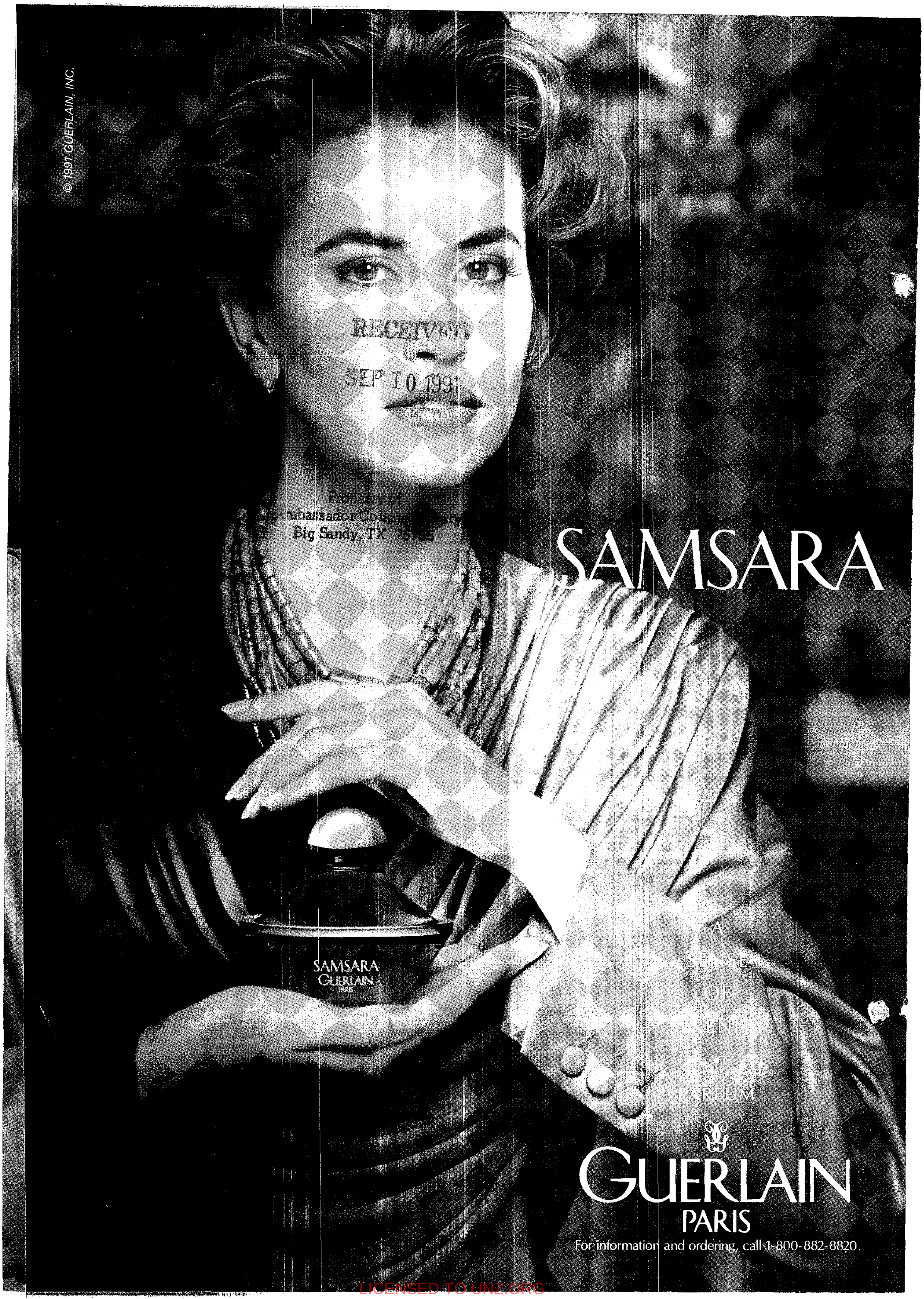
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